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Miss Rovel.

BY

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MISS ROVEL.

I.

TOM JONES, if his biography is to be believed, met, one evening, in the environs of Upton, an old misanthrope who had become a hermit. They called him the old man of the mountains. Clothed in the skin of an ass, he lived in the depths of a forest, where he had no difficulty in avoiding passers-by, from the fact that no one passed. He employed the days either in contemplating his long white beard, or in observing the plants and the stars. It was his creed, that all is beautiful in the universe except man, who dishonors creation. His misanthropy arose from having in youth been abandoned by his mistress, and betrayed by the friend who was under many obligations to him. Tom Jones tried to make him listen to reason, but it was in vain. "Why," said Jones to him, "do you vent your resentment upon all mankind? You have been the victim of a grievous mischance; but, believe me, I know honorable men and faultless women."

"You are still very young," replied the old man; "at your age I thought as you do."

Raymond Ferray did not wear a white beard: at the moment when this story opens, he was scarce thirty-four years old. He was not clad in the skin of an ass; for, if he was little troubled when he displeased others, he held to pleasing himself. Like the man of the mountains, he, too, had been betrayed by the woman he loved; and this experience had rendered him a misanthrope, or rather, a woman-hater. At the age of serious passions, he had sworn that he would have no more of them, and defied women to force an entrance to his heart. He felt himself protected from them by the height of his disdain.

The son of a provincial physician who had established himself in Paris, he had early been left an orphan. An uncle had become his guardian, and had proved more useful in managing his fortune,

which was considerable, than in advising him as to the choice of a profession. It is superfluous to say to the vineyards of Burgundy that they are born to produce wine: Raymond needed no one to aid him in discovering his vocation. After having for some time hesitated between poetry and science, he resolved to cultivate both. He made up his mind that exact precision is the virtue of great poets; and that, if a little science draws away from poetry, much science leads to it. His amazing precocity of intellect had been the admiration and the affright of his professors. At eighteen he knew Hebrew, Persian, and Arabic. Nature had evidently predestined him for an Orientalist.

Of medium height, vigorous and nervous, thin, tawny, with an aquiline nose, black eyes large and expressive, his glance at the same time lively and winning, his mouth small and firm, he had the appearance of an Arab; his physiognomy was that singular blending of almost feminine sweetness with a savage, almost ferocious boldness, which is peculiar to the Oriental. His comrades at the Lyceum had surnamed him the Bedouin, and the sobriquet was not designed as an insult. If they little fancied his brusque, sometimes haughty manners, they appreciated the reliability of his friendship, the nobility of his character, generous and frank as gold.

His beard had scarce sprouted, when he began to collect materials for a history of Mahomet, which in his opinion had not yet been written. This was to be his monument. Some competent judges, who were in the secret of his portfolios, declared that the future biographer of the prophet was a man of genius; that to vast erudition he united an uncommon sagacity; that he was called to revivify the history of the Orient by important discoveries. Like Anse de Villoison, Raymond would have deserved being a member of the Institute at twenty-four years. He cared little for this honor. His free, wilful, and somewhat fickle disposition,

was impatient of restraint, and infinitely preferred science to learned bodies.

He was approaching his thirtieth year, when he published the first volume of his History of Mahomet, which justified all the predictions of his friends. Before writing the second, he wished to become personally acquainted with Arabia. He passed two years ranging on horseback, or on the back of a camel, over the rocky valleys of the Yemen, the pasture-grounds of Nedjed, the sandy flats of Asha, mingling familiarly in the tent-life of the Hadesi and the Bedouins. With an audacity which might have proved fatal to him, he resolved to visit the holy places. Disguised as a dervish, he gained entrance to a caravan of pious Mussulmans; with them he went to pray at the tomb of the prophet; with them he made seven times the tour of the Caaba, and kissed devoutly the black stone. If he had been recognized, he would have paid dear for his temerity; and, to tell the truth, he was more than once in danger of his life. He owed his safety to his bronzed complexion, to his aquiline nose, to his marvellous possession of the language, and his remarkable *sang-froid*. On returning to Djeddah, he wrote an account of his adventure, which appeared in a celebrated review, and drew the attention of all Europe to the pretended pilgrim. Shortly after, he published a collection of sonnets, wrought by a master-hand; they exhaled the airs of Arabia, the immensity of the desert, a dreamy wisdom which had taken the turban.

Raymond had not gone to Arabia for the sole purpose of holding communion with Mahomet. He had withdrawn from Paris in obedience to a command. Is it hard to obey when one loves? This Bedouin had an ardent heart which knew no half-love. The beautiful Madame de P., whom he adored, had committed the folly of marrying a man violent as licentious, who rendered her very unhappy. Raymond had become the confidant, the consoler of her sorrows. For eighteen months he had been the happiest of mortals, when Monsieur de P. was attacked by an incurable malady. He became crippled, palsied, lost his sight, and the doctors declared he had not long to live. Madame de P., who to her beauty added every delicacy of the heart, said one evening to Raymond, "I cannot bear to deceive a sick man. My husband is condemned to death: let us respect his last days. Go to the desert, reap a harvest of science and of glory; render illustrious a name which I shall hereafter be proud to bear. Let us part for a time, and swear to me that you will not forget me."

This last recommendation was superfluous. Raymond took with him to the East fifty projects of work, a hundred

problems to be solved, and an adored remembrance which gave value to all the rest. He held converse with it in all the languages he knew. When one has the happiness of speaking Arabic, and of being loved by a Madame de P., two years of exile pass as a single day. All along the route, he received the most tender missives from his mistress; from them there exhaled an odor of passion which seemed to him a thousand times more precious than the myrrh and the balm of Mecca. The last which reached him apprised him that Monsieur de P. was no longer of this world. This tidings almost drove Raymond mad with ecstasy. He passed eight consecutive hours in contemplating the beauty of his future in the smoke of his chibouque. He felt within himself a strength to lift mountains, to renew all the miracles of Mahomet. It seemed to him that the stones and the plants saluted him as they had the prophet; that, if he wished, he might have the moon at his disposal. In the joy of his heart, he repeated this verse of the Koran: "Thou shalt possess the promised garden, laved by eternally fresh waters, shaded by eternally green trees. There thou shalt be visited by angels, entering through all the gates." He did not demand so many of these celestial beings: one angel sufficed for his paradise. He passed the night at his window, his glance lost in the firmament; he believed that there he saw beaming the eyes he loved.

Some months later he arrived in Paris, his heart a prey to that delicious inquietude which accompanies great hopes. He asked himself, "What will be her first word? Will she have strength to speak? Shall I have strength to remain standing before her? Shall we not both die of joy?" He arrived, he rushed to her. A morose *concierge* spared him the trouble of climbing the staircase which led to his paradise. This cruel man told him that Madame de P. was in Italy, where she had gone on her bridal tour, she having a fortnight before married a stock-broker.

The blow was terrible. It struck to the inmost heart, a man extreme in all his sentiments, and abandoned to his passion as a Mussulman to his destiny. Raymond fell dangerously ill. For six months he hovered between life and death. But his vigorous constitution triumphed. He left his bed alive, although only a shadow of his former self. Mahomet, Arabia, his talents, his dreams of the future and of glory,—he felt for them all, for all he had loved and hoped, only a profound and bitter indifference. He was, as it were, detached from his own life; the Raymond Ferray whom he had known for thirty years seemed to him a stranger

who had succumbed to a fatal accident. Impatient to forget entirely this dead man, he resolved to quit Paris, to expatriate his remembrances, to bury in some retreat closed from human gaze, his despair and his anger which extended to the whole race of Eve and Adam. He detested all women, who are only caprice and falsehood, and he could not pardon men for allowing themselves to be governed by so wicked and dangerous an animal.

It had happened, that, during his sojourn in Arabia, one of his uncles, married to a *Genevoise*, had died childless, leaving to his nephew a little estate situated three-quarters of a league from Geneva. He resolved that this estate, which he would call "The Hermitage," should be his destination. As soon as he was able to travel, he started for his hermitage, which pleased him vastly. A pretty house built on the crest of a hill, a garden, an orchard on the declivity, three large willows in the midst of a meadow, while below lay a little forest of ashes and poplars, on the borders of a rushing stream, — could one find a better place? If he had resolved to bury himself, he was not one of those individuals who can be content with any thing, and who, provided people do not annoy them, are satisfied with an interment of the humblest kind. He expected to enjoy some comfort in his coffin. He was soon installed within it.

The Prince de Ligne has said that agriculture and metaphysics are two honorable retreats, where, if one can still be deceived, at least it is not by men. Raymond, who had a facility for every thing, very soon learned how to cultivate his garden. He passed here the greater portion of his time. In the evening he philosophized. He had repudiated forever his favorite studies, as if they had been accomplices in his misfortune. Arabic and Persian were alike odious to him. He blushed to think that he had but yesterday composed madrigals in the language of the Saadi, in honor of the beautiful eyes of Madame de P. But, as some occupation is necessary to a mind so active, he conceived the project of translating Lucretius into verse, — Lucretius, that lofty contemner of the gods and the passions, the most sombre of the great poets, the only one he took pleasure still in reading. He possessed a rare edition of this poet, which he had magnificently bound. It was his evangel. He judged it useless to write in the margin, as a certain English commentator had done, "*Nota bene*: when I have finished my Lucretius, I shall have to kill myself." Scarce recovering from a malady which had nearly proved fatal, he loved to persuade himself that it

would yet carry him off, and that his life would end sooner than his translation.

Whatever might have been his aversion to women, Raymond had one of them with him, and it would have been difficult to dispense with her society. This woman was Mlle. Agatha Ferray, his sister. Small, thin, almost diaphanous, slightly lame in the left foot, her gaze downcast, her eyes blinking, her nose pointed, incessantly moving her lips as if she were muttering some eternal *oremus* or secretly conversing with herself, she had the attentive and restless air of a mouse occupied in nibbling at a thought. Assuredly she was neither handsome nor pretty; but the smile which illumined her animated face was almost divine. It expressed infinite mildness, and unfathomable depths of goodness. Although Mlle. Ferray wished well to all creation, including even dogs and cats, she reserved for her brother the depths of her heart. She was a dozen years older than he, and had taken the mother's place with him in childhood. Not to leave him, she had in her time refused an eligible marriage. This brother, who was sometimes rough to her, was her glory, her divinity, and her romance. She believed in his genius, she worshipped him. Her heart was rent with sorrow when he announced his resolution of abandoning Paris, of breaking away from his career to live henceforth as a hermit. She could scarce conceive that Madame de P.'s having married a stock-broker could be a reason for renouncing all. After some timid remonstrances which were ungraciously received, she resigned herself to the inevitable. She affected even to approve her brother's resolution, — to enter into his quarrel with life, but at the same time, she promised herself to restore this wounded heart. She was by temperament, an optimist; she held that all will arrange itself, and believed with the best part of her soul in a Providence incessantly occupied in disentangling entangled things, in mending, in patching, in rehabilitating, in redressing affairs and people that go wrong. She said to herself that these first transports of a despair which seemed excessive must pass away; full of confidence in the beneficent action of time, she believed assuredly that reason would have its day. Meantime this excellent housekeeper exerted herself to render life agreeable to her invalid. She prepared him good cheer, and, in default of something better, she encouraged him to prune his rose-bushes, and translate Lucretius. Scarce had he passed three months at The Hermitage, ere she had the delight of seeing his health re-established, his moods softened; the asperity of his chagrin had changed into what the fabulist calls the

sombre pleasures of a melancholy heart. It is certain that The Hermitage was a charming place. The spring, a brook, a willow, a nightingale—he was almost near the happiness in which he believed no longer.

But, if one undertakes to live in solitude, it rarely happens that one has not some neighbor. A gunshot beyond the brook upon whose meanderings Raymond so loved to gaze, rose a very elegant house which its proprietor rented every year to some one of the numerous birds of passage, the fine season draws to Geneva. This villa, which they had named “La Prairie,” had remained tenantless and closed for several months; but, in the first days of August, it opened its doors and windows, and a strange lady took possession. She was an English lady on the verge of forty, who was celebrated in all civilized countries for her beauty miraculously preserved, for the supreme elegance of her person, for her bearing so like that of a sultana or goddess, and especially for the number and *éclat* of her adventures, a few of which had been much noised abroad.

Lady Rovel was not one of those women who hide their true natures, who make good terms with the world, who say one thing and do another. That which Lady Rovel did, she said; that which she said, she did. She was, after her fashion, a woman of principles; she professed hers openly, and declared, that, without adventures, life would be a mortal *ennui*; that she had come into the world to do her own pleasure, and it was most decidedly her pleasure not to be ennuyé; that, moreover, she was accountable only to herself for her actions, and that what people may say of you frightens only fools. When an Englishwoman once decides to outrage the proprieties, she goes to such lengths as to astonish the whole world.

At sixteen years of age, Lady Rovel had married the governor of one of the English Antilles. Having averred, some years after marriage, that her disposition was absolutely incompatible with that of the Hon. Sir John Rovel, she had left Barbadoes to return to Europe, where she promenaded from capital to capital, her chestnut tresses arranged in a coronet, her robes a little too showy, and her fantasies innumerable. Superb, imperious, she well knew her full value; she would for a long time allow herself to be adored to no purpose; and, after throwing all her devotees into despair, she would all of a sudden, as by some mysterious illusion, become gracious. The happy ones of this world who had won her favor—and among them figured three great personages and one crowned head—had seen themselves treated by her as subjects

by their sovereign. She exacted from all an absolute submission, led them with a high *bâton*, and at the least affront broke with them irretrievably. The reason of all this was, that, like Diogenes with lantern in hand, she was seeking an ideal man. She had more than once believed that she had found him, but had soon confessed herself deceived; yet, when one has a taste for science, and a genius for discovery, one is not easily disheartened. She continued to seek; she did not despair of finding.

Her last mistake had been an Italian prince with whom she had become so much infatuated as to depart with him for Syria. This prince chancing to make a mediocre enough figure in an encounter with brigands, she banished him from her heart that minute, and forsook him. She was readily consoled for her disillusion by the chief of the band who had robbed him. But she found, that, despite his romantic physiognomy, this pickpocket was not at all gallant; that he prized a fine ransom far more than a fine woman. Furious at this double deception, Lady Rovel, as soon as she recovered her liberty, returned to Europe, and came to Switzerland for quiet and repose. Arriving at Geneva, she consulted a physician, who advised the country, rest, and asses' milk. Regardless of the displeasure she was about to cause an ex-Arabian, she came to lodge in his neighborhood, proposing to pass here the remainder of the summer.

She took regularly her diet of asses' milk, and it was not in this particular that she discommoded Raymond; but he had little taste for her method of enjoying and practising repose. There are women to whom the faculty recommend in vain that solitude which is forbidden them by nature. They exercise a power of attraction, which nothing can resist; wherever they place themselves, they become the centre of a whirlwind. Enclose a honeycomb in a buffet, and you will be very skilful if you prevent the flies rushing to it. Lady Rovel had not been three days at La Prairie, when all the strangers of distinction *en route* for Geneva had wind of her arrival. She knew all Europe, and all Europe knew her. Young or old, some came to her from habit, others from curiosity; others still, impelled by hope, hurried on to force her gates. She soon held full court, and it was a very noisy court. The whole fashionable world came and went on horseback or in carriages; they breakfasted on the lawn, they supped upon the terrace, they fired pistols, they chatted, they laughed. Evenings there were Venetian illuminations, and concerts prolonged far into the night. This continual hurrah cruelly tortured Raymond's ears, and interrupted his mute contemplations with

the sylvan divinities of his little forest, which had now lost its mystery. This invalid would gladly have had straw laid before his gates; he adored long silences. The only sounds which he could tolerate were the murmur of the brook running past, the confidences a poplar breathed out to the wooing breezes, and, at midnight, the distant barking of a watchdog at some passer-by or at the moon.

Lady Rovel had two children,—a son who had remained at Barbadoes with his father, and a daughter who had come to Europe with her mother. Miss Meg Rovel had not yet reached her sixteenth year. She was a blonde with black eyes, very captivating in person, well formed for her age, full of strength and health, lively, restless, with feet and hands forever in motion. They treated her as a child, and it was only justice, although she complained of it, and fumed at the short dresses she was compelled to wear; but the child promised to be one day beautiful as her mother. The one was an admirable hot-house flower: in seeing the other you thought of a superb peach of the espalier. A little more rain and sun, and to-morrow the fruit would be ripe; happy he who could pluck it!

Meg had always been, by turns, an idol and an embarrassment to her mother. Lady Rovel was proud of this growing beauty; but a child in an incidental, wandering life is a great incumbrance. When Lady Rovel's heart was unoccupied, she persuaded herself that she was the tenderest of mothers, and she saw nothing more adorable than her daughter. This illusion would endure for good or ill, until she flattered herself that she was once more on the track of the ideal man. There would then be a new lease with passion; and just as the caprice seized her, she stowed Meg away somewhere, as one relieves one's self of a troublesome package. This new experience having ere long miscarried like the preceding, sobered by her chimera, and renouncing forever, that is to say until the new moon, the idea of finding the phoenix, the dream of which tormented her, she would suddenly remember that she had a daughter, that this daughter was necessary to the happiness of her life. As when in repose she had an excellent memory, she would recollect exactly where she had placed her, and hasten to seek her.

Thus it had happened on her return from Syria; and thus Meg, as well as her mother, had become the neighbor of Raymond Ferray. Tender mother as she was, Lady Rovel found in her whirling life only three minutes a day to occupy herself with the education of her daughter. The child was growing up as it pleased

God, under the care of a languishing negress named Pamela, who took little thought of her young charge, her sole study being to adorn herself, and to contemplate her flat nose and white teeth in a little pocket-mirror which never left her. And so Meg was almost absolute mistress of her employments and her time. The work she preferred to all others, was to play cricket, to balance herself on the fences, to climb trees, to angle for crawfish in the brook, to tear her dresses in all the brambles. In her walks, she incessantly ran away from the indolent Pamela, whose nasal voice, calling after her, echoed all around. "Meg, come back!" she would cry; "Meg, where are you? Meg, take care, the craw-fish will eat you!" Raymond from his garden heard the long-drawn appeals, and wished with all his heart that Meg could be eaten once for all. He had other causes of complaint, even more serious ones, against this horrible child. She had vague enough notions as to *meum* and *teum*, and a pronounced taste for marauding. He suspected her of sometimes cutting across the brook, to despoil his espaliers. He watched her, surprised her in the flagrant act; but, supple as an eel, the young freebooter glided through his fingers, and ran away laughing him to scorn.

Mlle. Agatha Ferray was far from sharing her brother's resentment against their neighbors. Indulgence, that daughter of heaven, had builded an inviolable temple in her heart, the sanctuary of the Graces. This easy-tempered person comprehended all, excused all, pardoned all. When the misdeeds of some sinner were recounted to her, she would begin by being indignant at the culprit, by crying out against him; and then she would add quickly, "And yet, when we reflect, all explains itself; and, if we could only obtain from this evil-doer a promise not to repeat the crime, ah, just God! we must pardon him,—we who so often stand in need of pardon ourselves."

If the majority of people were of Mlle. Ferray's character, there would be no more lawsuits in the world; the tribunals would have a perpetual holiday, the lawyers would have to shut up shop. Her eyes revealed the exquisite benevolence of her soul; they seemed to cry, like the angels of the Lord, "Peace on earth, good will toward men!" And yet she had another reason for bearing patiently the conduct of Lady Rovel and her daughter. Saint as she was, she had not ceased being woman; she could scarce accommodate herself to so uniform a life, deprived of all incident. I suspect that Saint Theresa herself was not sorry to have neighbors, and to know what was passing on the other side of her hedge.

"Car pour les nouveautés
On peut avoir parfois des curiosités."

These are the delicate spices of innocent lives. As women have peculiar facilities for learning or divining what they wish to know, and as they always love to exercise these talents, three days had sufficed Mlle. Ferray without much extra exertion to discover very nearly who Lady Rovel was, and to imagine the rest.

Unknown to her brother, she had occasion to see this British lioness close by, and to extend her an act of courtesy. The borders of The Hermitage boasted a dense thicket of moss-roses of incomparable beauty. Lady Rovel, passing along the road on horseback, perceived these roses through the iron lattice, and, without further ceremony, ordered her groom to bring her a bouquet. Mlle. Ferray, who chanced to be there, hastened to satisfy this august desire. She arranged a bouquet, gave herself the pleasure of offering it in person, and was recompensed for her politeness by a nod and an Olympian smile.

Two days later, walking along the brook-side, she perceived Meg seated on the opposite bank, chattering with a magpie which gave her great delight. Mlle. Ferray adjusted her lorgnette upon her nose; and, after some moments of silent contemplation, she cried, "My lovely child, instead of stealing peaches, why do you not ask for them?"

Meg impudently replied, "My dear mademoiselle, it is because stolen peaches taste better than any others."

And, rising, she made a low reverence.

Far from being scandalized at Meg's impertinence, Mlle. Ferray took away with her from this short interview a lively admiration for those large black eyes which seemed to devour the face, and a profound pity for this neglected child, and for the future in store for her. The examples which Miss Rovel had before her eyes, the conversations she heard in her mother's *salon*, the long hours she passed in solitude, which is very often the Devil's advocate, all must contribute equally to pervert this young soul. Who would save her from herself and from others? The excellent demoiselle meditated a great deal upon this. In the country one has much time to follow one's thoughts, and hers ran on so quickly that she often found it difficult to overtake them.

II.

ONE morning when Raymond was walking in the orchard with his sister, he redoubled his complaints against the

neighbors destiny had sent as an infliction upon them. Last evening, the moon being at its full, Lady Rovel had taken a fancy to have her tea-table set upon the borders of the stream which divided the two estates. After supper, violins, hautboys, and hunting-horns had kept Raymond awake until the dawn. To crown all, his gardener had just informed him that a new insult had been offered to his fruits: five or six of the finest peaches had disappeared with the branch that bore them. Raymond had cause enough for formal complaint against the hautboys of Lady Rovel, and the high-handed proceedings of Miss Meg. He declared that his patience was at an end, that he should take legal counsel as to means of protecting his sleep and his espaliers.

Mlle. Ferray venerated her brother too much to openly contradict him. She was always of his opinion, but she was very careful not to review in detail what she had conceded to him in the gross. This is really an art in which women excel. She entered into his feelings, she espoused all his grievances; then she timidly suggested to him, that at night, when the moon shines, an air upon the hautboy is not disagreeable; that, as for the peaches, it was by no means certain that Miss Rovel had stolen and eaten them. She added, that this poor little girl, having been once caught in such a trespass, would not be likely to repeat it, that she had no doubt profited by the lesson, and The Hermitage had nothing more to fear from her depredations.

Mlle. Ferray had reached this point in her demonstration, when at the end of the orchard she perceived something like a great black ball, which with one bound passed over the hedge. Her brother, who was very far and very clear sighted, assured her that this ball was composed of a pony and an Amazon, the one bearing the other, and that this Amazon was Miss Meg, who was thus practising her riding-school exercises. The perilous leap she had just executed had not proved a success. The pony fell on one side, Meg on the other. But Meg was not at the mercy of a fall: she quickly picked herself up, bounded back into the saddle, lashed the pony with the great whip she held in her hands, and dashed across the orchard. The aftermath was magnificent this year; the grass rose to the lower branches of the plum and pear trees. Raymond raised a cry of indignation, and sought to precipitate himself upon the enemy; but the enemy saw him coming, and, darting aside into the forest swiftly as the pony's four legs could carry her, gained a place where the bed of the stream had become so narrow that in a case of emergency it was possible to

leap across. In the twinkle of an eye, the leap was made; and, perceiving herself out of reach, Meg from her stronghold upon the opposite bank set up a victorious hurrah.

"I tell you once for all, Agatha, this is too much!" cried Raymond as soon as he could recover breath; and he ran incontinently to Lady Rovel, to signify to her that the collier expects to be master in his own domain.

He handed his card to a *valet de chambre* who ushered him into a little parlor where he waited for some time. At last a door opened, and Lady Rovel appeared wearing a rich dressing-gown trimmed with lace, her hair negligently arranged, rippling around shoulders that Juno might have envied. She had just issued from the bath, fresh, invigorated, her complexion dazzling; beautiful as a summer sun which arises from the bosom of the waves. Despite the errand on which he had come, this enemy of woman could not resist a sort of fascination. But he soon composed his visage, and forbade its betrayal of so unworthy a weakness. He examined Lady Rovel, and Lady Rovel examined him. She was struck with his energetic, expressive face, with the fire of his glance. It seemed to her that this meagre little man might perhaps be somebody. In any event, she did not doubt that he had come to present her his devoirs or his homage, perhaps to thank her for having deigned to admire his roses; surely he had the intention of laying at her feet his hedges, his orchard, his house, his ox, his ass, and his own person. She was accustomed to such ardors.

She advanced toward Raymond, fixing upon him a glance which was neither rigid nor disdainful, and motioned to him to take a seat.

"If I do not deceive myself, monsieur, we are country neighbors," said she.

"Yes, madame, to my sorrow," replied he dryly.

This response, and the gesture which accompanied it, made Lady Rovel recoil a step: she would little allow any one to speak to her in that tone. She observed Raymond anew; she scanned him from head to foot, as if to take the measure of the varlet. She said to herself, "What is this insect? Whence does he come? What would he have? Can he be so lacking in sense, as not to know to whom he speaks?"

But, the more she regarded him, the less she succeeded, in spite of her efforts, in convincing herself that Raymond was an insect. She persuaded herself that she had been deceived; that she had taken for insolence, an embarrassed declaration, the transport of an amorous despair; that doubtless Raymond had wished to say, —

"I am very unhappy in being your neighbor, madame; for, if La Prairie did not adjoin the Hermitage, I should not have occasion to see you pass before my lattices, and the tranquillity of my heart, as well as the repose of my nights, would encounter fewer dangers."

Satisfied with this interpretation, which made all clear, she sat down, saying, —

"Explain yourself to me, monsieur. Why are you so unhappy in having me for a neighbor?"

"I beg your pardon, madame," replied he. "I am an original; I have a solitary disposition; all my neighbors displease me, whoever they may be, and more especially if they have what seems to me an exaggerated taste for the hunting-horn. I admit at the same time that I am wrong in reproaching you for your little serenade last night, and the sleeplessness it caused me. Now admit, on your part, that, if you are allowed to do what you please at home, my rights as proprietor are also sacred as yours. But you have a daughter, who, permit me to tell you, is a child very badly reared, and who has no very clear idea as to *mine* and *thine*. On several occasions, she has come to steal my peaches; and now she has taken the liberty to pass my hedge, and make her horse caracole right through the midst of my beautiful meadow. Be careful, I pray you, to lay some restraint upon her; shut her up in her chamber sometimes, and give her certain enlightenments as to her rights and her duties: she seems to me to have need of them."

During this harangue, Lady Rovel had experienced an access of astonishment and indignation, which was almost suffocating to her. That a man could have the illustrious fortune of finding himself *tête-à-tête* with her at the hour when she had just left the bath; and that this man should be so bereft of reason, so denuded of judgment, so abandoned by all the gods, as to employ these short, precious instants in speaking of her faults and of his meadow-grass, — such a piece of folly had in it something so unusual, so strange, so rough, that she could not believe it, that she asked herself if it had really happened. As soon as she had recovered from her stupor, she rose brusquely, and said, —

"Monsieur, will you have the goodness to calculate the exact value of your grass and of your peaches? Send me your bill, and it shall be paid upon the instant."

"I shall send you no bill, madame," replied he: "I only desire you to address some salutary warning to your daughter, so that, in future, I may be under no necessity of troubling you with my complaints."

"Ah, monsieur," replied she, raising her voice, "you ought to know that a

man who has the least sense, or the least character, — one goes but a little way without the other, — complains of nothing to nobody, that he regulates all his little affairs himself, and does himself justice. If you surprise Meg marauding around your place, assume yourself the task of seizing her and shutting her up. I will then discuss with you the price of her ransom. It will afford me infinite pleasure to meet again a man who, I confess to you, has succeeded in astonishing me; and God knows how rare astonishments are with me in these days."

Whereupon, having courtesied to him with ironical politeness, she walked hastily to the door. At the moment of putting her hand upon the latch, she turned her head, and once more gazed at this preposterous man with an air of astonishment mingled with profound disdain, as if she were contemplating in some booth at a fair, an albino, a calf with three heads, or any other phenomenon of the same kind. Then she murmured in English between her teeth, "*What a bear!*"

"I know English, madame," said Raymond, with a graceful inclination.

"*Was für ein Bär!*" returned she.

"And German," added he.

"In that case, *qué oso!*"

"And a little Spanish," said he.

She began to laugh immoderately, and cried, "Very well, monsieur. I ought to have begun by saying to you in good French, that you are one of the most ill trained bears I have ever met in the great menagerie of this world." And with these words she disappeared.

Raymond returned home highly displeased with the reception that had been given to his complaints, and firmly resolved to administer to Miss Rovel the briskest of lessons, if she ever fell into his hands; but destiny, which laughs at our anger as well as at our love, had decided that this very day, far from taking vengeance for the forage upon his garden, and the insult to his grass so outrageously trampled down, he should render Meg the most essential of services, in saving her from the consequences into which one of her innumerable freaks had involved her.

In the afternoon he had been taking a walk with his sister. Upon the return, as they were passing behind La Prairie, their attention was suddenly arrested by shrill cries of fury and despair which had nothing human. One would have said now, that these frightful howls were set up by a traveller, who, scaling a precipice, felt the rope break which attached him to his companions; now, that they were the shrill mutterings of a hencoop invaded by a pole-cat, or the hoarse bellowings of a stag fallen into some ambushade, and angrily protesting against his captivity.

Mlle. Ferray trembled, grew pale, and stood still. "What is going on at our neighbor's now?" said she to Raymond. "I really believe they are killing somebody."

"A beautiful state of things!" replied he, shrugging his shoulders. "I think I recognize the voice of Miss Meg. That adorable child loves music as well as her mother."

He was about proceeding on his way. His sister held him by the lappet of his coat, assuring him that some great calamity had happened, and they were calling for help. The cries having redoubled in intensity, she hung to his arm, and dragged him along the avenue of acacias that led to Lady Rovel's house. When the man of the mountain — Fielding assures us that it was so — heard from a hilltop the despairing appeals of an unhappy woman whom a bandit was about to strangle, he left Tom Jones to steal alone to her defence; while he seated himself unconcernedly on the grass, and began to contemplate the sky. Raymond was by no means so consummate a misanthrope as the man of the mountain; it is not given to every one to be perfect in his rôle.

Having traversed the vestibule without meeting any one, he penetrated to an ante-chamber, which contained a huge clothes-press of old oak, closed with a double door. It was from this clothes-press that the cries issued. Two steps from it, an affrighted negress was muttering *paternosters*, raising frequent cries of "*Alas!*" and extending her arms to heaven, not knowing upon what saint to call. Perplexed people are always happy in finding some one to speak to. The negress ran to Raymond; and, forcibly repressing her cries, she explained to him in English, that Meg having committed the indiscretion of trying on a robe of her mother's, and the awkwardness of making a rent in it, Lady Rovel, greatly irritated, had shut her up in this old oak clothes-press; that, immediately after, three gentlemen had called to see milady; that she had left on horseback with them; that before leaving she had forgotten to set her child at liberty; that no one knew when she would return, her promenades being sometimes very long; and that it was to be feared Meg would die of convulsions before her return. It was this which had made Pamela the most embarrassed of all waiting-maids. During the first half-hour Meg had affected the bravado of laughing, of singing, of saying that a clothes-press was a very delightful place, and that she found herself wonderfully happy in hers; after this, perceiving the want of air, a fear of stifling had taken possession of her, and she had vainly tried to force open the door.

Then, calling Pamela, she had begged for the key of the press; and, Pamela having in her turn implored Meg to have a little patience, Meg had now insulted her, now threatened her, and at last she had begun to scream; she was screaming still. It was difficult to conceive how these youthful lungs could be capable of such prodigious efforts.

Raymond asked the negress if she knew where the key of the press was. Pamela replied that she did; but she represented to him how dangerous it would be to trifle with Lady Rovel by opening a door Lady Rovel had closed, in fact, to go counter to Lady Rovel in the least of her whims, which were as sacred as the law and the prophets. Raymond cut short her remonstrances by ordering her to bring the key. She handed it to him trembling, and he at once opened the door. Pale, dishevelled, Meg with one bound left her prison, and darted into the middle of the room, fixing her glowing eyes upon her liberator, ready to fly into his face like a young cat, which, with distended claws, confounds friends and foes, and seeks some one upon whom to vent its rage for injury.

Her movement had been so brusque, her attitude was so threatening, that good Mlle. Ferray could not repress a gesture of affright. She withdrew precipitately toward the door, covering her eyes with her hand, as if to place them beyond the reach of harm. Her terror seemed to amuse Meg, whose rage immediately gave place to an access of boisterous, almost convulsive hilarity, which was succeeded by a half-swoon. She would have fallen rigid upon the floor, if Mlle. Ferray had not received her in her arms, and, seating her in a chair, made her inhale from a vial of salts. Meg speedily recovered her senses. The first use she made of them was to regard Raymond attentively and with a frown. He began to reproach himself for the foolish impulse of commiseration which had led him to render a service to his enemy. His countenance was so expressive that Meg without difficulty divined what was passing in his mind.

"What a comical air you have!" she said to him, going off into a new burst of laughter. "You repent of your good action! What troubles me is that a kindness places one under obligation, and I see myself condemned to steal no more of your peaches."

"You can ask us for them," said Mlle. Ferray.

"Ask! ask!" returned she with a wry face. "It is so much nicer to help one's self!"

During this interlude, the negress had prudently kept at a distance; now, seeing her young mistress restored to a more pa-

cific disposition, she approached, and with much circumlocution insinuated to Meg, that, as she had taken in a sufficient quantity of fresh air, it only remained to her to re-enter the clothes-press with the best grace possible, so that, when that terrible mamma returned, she might find her daughter where she had left her. Meg considered the proposition entirely out of place. "Don't you know, Pamela," she said, "that mamma has so many ideas in her head that she often gets confused in her reckoning? I would wager that at this moment she has a vague recollection of having put some one into a clothes-press, and if upon her return she finds some one there she will be content. Do me the favor to put yourself in my place, and all will be well."

Pamela, who little relished this substitution, maintained that Lady Rovel, despite the abundance of her ideas, had a fearful exactness of memory, and that such devotion on her own part would be of no avail. "Lord Jesus! what shall we say to my lady?" cried she in a tragic tone, stealing a glance at herself in her little pocket-mirror, — a sweet exercise which she practised in the midst even of the gravest pre-occupations. Mlle. Ferray ended this debate by declaring that she took all upon herself, that she assumed all responsibility, that she charged herself with all explanations; in brief, that she was confident of obtaining Meg's pardon. "Accompany us to The Hermitage, my dear child," she said. "I will bring you home very soon; and, if your mother absolutely wishes to punish some one, it is I who will pass the night in the clothes-press."

"Agreed! I like that!" cried Meg, familiarly placing her arm around Mlle. Ferray's waist; "but swear to me, that, when I am at your house, monsieur your brother shall not eat me."

Mlle. Ferray made a warning gesture with her finger. She would not allow any one to speak lightly of the good God or of Monsieur Raymond Ferray. Then she whispered in Meg's ear, "Re-assure yourself: his eyes are larger than his mouth." And, as soon as Meg had put on her hat, she led her to The Hermitage. Along the way she asked her many questions, accompanied with many caresses, which Meg received with an absent air, like a princess who knows her birth and her merit, and who flatters herself that she has a right to every kindness and attention.

Mlle. Ferray had this trait rare among persons unkindly dealt with by nature: she adored beauty wherever she found it, — in a pretty woman, as well as in a pretty plant. Beauty is harmony; and Mlle. Ferray had a good, beautiful soul,

which felt a need of believing that all is harmonious in this world; that it has been created by a grand musician; that he who has made the stars march on their course, and the earth revolve to the strains of a divine lyre, will permit dissonances only to prepare and heighten the effect of the grand final accord. If Mlle. Ferray had possessed a metaphysical head, she would have gone through a long course of reasoning to convince herself that the apparent disorders of nature and of life only contribute to the universal order. A rose in its freshness, and the charm of a youthful smile, absolved her from reasoning. In contemplating them, she held it proven that the musician exists; she believed she heard the harpings of the divine lyre, and existence became a delight to her. Such was the creed of Mlle. Ferray. Perhaps it would appear insufficient to rigid consciences and to dogmatic minds; but, in this matter of dogma, each takes that which suits him: each, as the Princess Palatine said, makes for himself a little religion apart from himself, and it is the height of impertinence for one to attempt to impose his own religion upon others. To Mlle. Ferray it seemed, that, of all proofs of the existence of a God, Meg was the most convincing. She admired the contours of her face which Lawrence would have sighed to paint; her large, beaming eyes, the vibrations of her life-inhaling nostrils, the blonde hair floating loosely over her shoulders, the clearness and frankness of her glance, her full, melodious voice, like the song of the blackbird in the forest. She could not withdraw her eyes from this young creature; and she said to herself, "If I could be allowed to rear this little girl, her soul should one day be beautiful as her face."

On her part, Meg felt inclined to receive Mlle. Ferray into her friendship. Nothing is more egotistic than the friendship of children, and nothing is more clairvoyant than their egotism. They very soon learn to feel the pulse of those around them, and know what they can expect. Their young and ardent minds see in us older people, whatever we are, only obstacles or playthings. Meg had not gone fifty steps by Mlle. Ferray's side, when she said to herself, "This dear demoiselle is a good, simple creature, with whom I can do whatever I like. She is one of those nice people who allow you to abuse her." And one of the great pleasures of children is to abuse.

All at once she cried out, "There comes the enemy!" She had just perceived her mother mounted on a white nag, and escorted as usual by a brilliant staff of all nations. Lady Rovel was advancing toward her daughter. She had a

piercing glance; and, recognizing Meg from a distance, she was struck with astonishment. She soon recollected that she possessed a clothes-press and a daughter, and that, upon leaving for her ride, she had shut up this daughter in the clothes-press. How had she got out? was the all-important question. Meg hid as best she could behind her new friend, who continued to advance with the intrepidity of those short-sighted mortals who are not aware of danger until they have thrust their noses into it. An instant after, she hit her head against the muzzle of a white mare which blocked up the way. A voice cried out to her, "If I am not too impertinent, mademoiselle, I would like to ask where you are taking my daughter."

The sharpness of this voice made Mlle. Ferray tremble; but charity is not easily disconcerted. She fixed her little twinkling eyes upon Lady Rovel, and, declaring that Meg's cries had touched her heart, begged the mother to excuse her audacious interference. "I shall not restore to you this lovely child, madame," she added in her most caressing voice, "until you have promised to pardon us both for all we have done."

Lady Rovel had at first listened with a severe air; but an idea occurred to her: she had a great many of them, as Meg said. She all at once discovered that Mlle. Ferray was the providential solution of a little problem which had been perplexing her for an hour past; and it was with a benevolent smile that she said, "You have a tender heart, mademoiselle."

"It is a reproach they often cast upon me, madame."

"And you love children?"

"Passionately."

"As well as your roses?"

"Far more, if possible."

"I am charmed," cried Lady Rovel: then, giving rein to her nag, she planted herself opposite Raymond, who had remained immovable a hundred paces to the rear. Since morning he had been revolving in his head the translation of a thorny passage in the *De Rerum Natura*. He had just found two lines that pleased him, and, for fear of letting them escape, had stopped to write them in his notebook.

"Have I dreamed, monsieur," said Lady Rovel to him, "that you came to my house this morning, moved by a noble rage, to declare to me that my daughter, Miss Rovel, is a monster?"

"If those are not my words, they are exactly what I meant," he replied coldly, his nose stuck in his tablets.

"I believe also that you implored me to inflict upon her a punishment worthy of her faults."

"That is true, madame."

"Who has set the bird at liberty?"

"It was I, madame, but not because I wished her the least good. Mademoiselle your daughter has an insupportable fashion of crying; and I implore you in future not to leave her in the depths of a buffet, and then forget her."

"Yes or no, monsieur: did you not this morning declare to me in the most decisive tone, that the collier is master in his own house?"

"I think I remember saying so, madame."

"My daughter and my clothes-presses, are they not my own?"

"Assuredly, madame."

"Monsieur, is it not the first duty of a man who respects himself, to have a little consecutiveness in his ideas?"

"I a long time ago renounced that duty, madame. In a world of fools, woe to him who prides himself upon being always reasonable!" And he began to write again.

"This man," cried Lady Rovel in English, "is the most insupportable of all the cold-blooded animals!"

"That signifies, madame, *que je suis le plus insupportable de tous les animaux à sang froid*. You keep forgetting that I know foreign languages."

"Meg!" cried Lady Rovel, from an unapproachable height, "I permit you to accompany Monsieur Ferray home. Try to profit by his conversation, which is as instructive as agreeable."

At these words she rode away on the gallop, her staff following, and soon all disappeared in a whirlwind of dust. Meg, who during this conversation had kept herself close to Mlle. Ferray's skirts, now took that good lady's hand, and at her side started for The Hermitage. "Dear mademoiselle, give me your hospitality for two hours," she said. "It takes just that time for mamma to forget her anger."

Children propose, and God disposes. Meg, an hour later, was engaged in helping Mlle. Ferray arrange her borders, and was taking great delight in this occupation which was new to her, when a dray loaded with two or three trunks entered the court. It was preceded by the negress. She held in her hand a letter which she delivered to Mlle. Ferray. The letter, an infernal scrawl, with seeming fly-tracks from top to bottom, contained these words:—

"Mademoiselle, it has been proposed to me to leave this very evening for the Engadine, the weather being propitious, and to attempt the ascension of the Bernina and some other peaks, which I am assured no other woman has ever scaled or ever will scale, especially at this sea-

son. Meg is a great hinderance to this lovely project. Children are like baggage in the army; on the day of battle it is well for the soldier to have only a haversack upon his back. You will agree with me that I cannot take Meg to the summit of the Bernina. If I fall into a precipice, I wish to fall alone. It has appeared to me that you feel some friendship for her, and I have no doubt that you will consent to keep her with you until my return. I am truly happy in being able to confide her to your kind care. It has also appeared to me as if monsieur your brother must interest himself very much in the education of children. He has complained that I rear my daughter ill. I shall be very grateful to him if he will deign to retouch my work; and I am sure that Meg will profit vastly in the society of a man so distinguished, although in my opinion he is somewhat wanting in consecutiveness of ideas; but no one is expected to be perfect. I wish it to be understood that you have the right to impose upon me any conditions you choose; I subscribe to them in advance, and upon my return we will arrange all to your liking. My absence will probably be for a fortnight, perhaps longer, for I wish to deceive no one; and I may as well confess to you, that some years ago, having left Paris at precisely eight o'clock in the morning to pass the afternoon at Fontainebleau, I pressed on to Madrid, whence I did not return for a year. As it is necessary to be prepared for all, precipices and avalanches, if any accident happens to me upon the Bernina, have the kindness to write to the Hon. Sir John Rovel, Governor-General of Barbadoes and other of the Lesser Antilles. He will inform you what you are to do with Meg.

"Your very grateful

"LADY AURORA ROVEL."

There were a great many parentheses in the letters of Lady Rovel. There were also very many in her mind and in her conduct; and, to tell the truth, parentheses pleased her more than any thing else in the world. She began with them, she ended with them, and then she resumed her phrase or her project as if nothing at all had happened. And she did well to reckon upon future contingencies; not that there was any fear of accident to her in her mountain ascensions. She had a sure foot, and a head proof against all vertigoes; but then she might happen to meet upon the summit of Bernina that ideal man, and, upon descending, might depart with him for St. Petersburg or Constantinople.

As Mlle. Ferray read the letter, her face glowed with pleasure. Never had she believed more devoutly in Providence,

that divinity she loved everywhere to recognize, with whom she held incessant converse, who sometimes made her await his responses, but who always spoke at last. Since the single hour she had known Meg, she had said a hundred times *in petto*, "O Providence, without thy interposition, what will become of this blonde with the black eyes? O Providence, might it only be thy will to give her to me! I should have the pleasure of gazing at her, the still greater pleasure of educating her; it would be a sweet occupation for me, and, for her, safety and happiness." "I will grant thy wish," Providence had just said to her, this time giving a most speedy answer.

Mlle. Ferray caressed Meg on both cheeks. She reached her the letter, imploring her to read it in her turn. Meg read it twice; she grew pale, was seized with a nervous trembling, and taking up her straw hat, with which she had decked a vine-prop, she set out at full speed to seek the mother whom she loved, whom she admired even far more than she feared. Pamela had great trouble in overtaking her. She explained to the child all that had been arranged, that three-quarters of an hour must have sufficed Lady Rovel to do her packing, pay her servants' wages, put them out at the door, close the house, and settle every thing. Meg tore her hair: she was inconsolable. All of a sudden an idea crossed her mind. "If I remain with you," she said to Mlle. Ferray, "will you allow me to wear long dresses?"

Mlle. Ferray pledged her most sacred word that she would allow it, assuring Meg that one of the dresses should have a train. Meg remained for a moment pensive, her nose in the air, gazing at the clouds; she doubtless saw there a long skirt *en train*, such an one as she had often envied her mother for possessing. The heavens which she interrogated declared to her that actually the greatest felicity of this world is to wear long dresses. She exclaimed excitedly, "In that case it is another affair!" And all at once she dried her tears, resumed her gayety and her watering-pot, holding which in her hand, she hopped on one foot twice around the border.

It was not enough for Mlle. Ferray to have quieted Meg: she hastened to find her lord and master, and recount the incident to him. Certain of encountering a storm, she hauled in all her sails; and it was with an abashed air, with a face an ell long, that she entered Raymond's study, warning him by this sort of preamble that she had come to announce the most painful, the most deplorable, the most ominous tidings. He might well have believed that his banker had fled, that The Hermitage was about to be swal-

lowed up in an earthquake. After having left time to allow all possible disasters to pass in review before his mind, she presented him Lady Rovel's letter. Despite all this skilful preparation, Raymond drew himself up to a formidable height. "Ah, ha!" cried he, "the plot is admirable, and here is a jest, comic enough! Do they take my house for a foundling hospital? Let this young miss be sent to her mother immediately!"

Mlle. Ferray replied that such had been her first thought, but that Lady Rovel had gone, and no one knew what road she had taken.

"There is one thing more certain yet," replied he, striking his fist upon the table: "it is that this silly, ill-mannered child shall not remain here an hour longer. Let them go back to browse at La Prairie, she and her negress!"

Mlle. Ferray alleged that this had been her second thought, but that Lady Rovel had taken care to close the house, and carry off the keys.

"May the Devil carry her off herself! My dear, put on your bonnet as quickly as possible, and conduct this Meg into the first boarding-school you find."

"That is a most admirable idea!" exclaimed Mlle. Ferray. She hastened to the door: then turning around, she said, "My dear brother, we must take all things into consideration. If we put this reprobate young lass into a boarding-school, we remain responsible for her; and if, as I do not doubt, she should escape some fine morning, it would be our duty to run after her. Do you not think it would be better to keep her here? In a fortnight her mother will come to take her home."

"In a fortnight—in fourteen days or in fourteen months, or in fourteen years," replied he furiously. "What reliance can you place upon a whirligig like her? And who knows whether this triple fool has not judged it the proper thing to make us a present of the girl for life? Order a carriage for me without further delay: I shall very well know how to find this tender mother, even though she is at the summit of the Bernina, and to restore her property to her."

"But wait until you know whether it is to the Bernina that she intends to go," replied Mlle. Ferray gently. "She must have wished to place us upon the wrong track. You have judged her rightly, Raymond. She is a triple fool, and it is possible that in a few hours she will have embarked for China. I really fear that you would incommode yourself to no purpose, that you would lose your trouble and your steps."

"Very well, I renounce the idea of going in pursuit of her; but her daughter shall pass the night in the open air.

Could you in any event, Agatha, have the effrontery to ask me to adopt this abominable child?"

"What an enormity!" replied she. "How can you believe — But, now I think of it, she has a father, this poor little girl, and it is his duty to dispose of her. Let us write to him. The trouble is that he lives a great way off; but at last, in a few weeks, we shall have his answer, and a few weeks will soon pass."

After having decried this proposition, after having stormed most delightfully, finding nothing better, and upon the formal assurances which were given him by his sister, that, during her short sojourn at The Hermitage, Meg should be exclusively under her care, that she would conceal her under her skirts, that he should never hear her spoken of, all ended by his resigning himself, fuming with rage, to her suggestion. In order to lose no time, seizing a pen, he wrote then and there to the governor of the Little Antilles, that he had had the good fortune to find his daughter in a clothespress, and implored him to be so kind as to inform him, as soon as possible, whether he should put her back there, or embrace the first opportunity of forwarding her to Barbadoes. While he was writing, Mlle. Ferray cried with a doleful air, "What an *ennui*! What an embarrassment! Who could have foreseen this annoyance? How I repent having brought this child here!"

The letter being written, she took it to send it to the post. As soon as she had closed the door, her face grew cheerful. Something said to her that the governors of the English Antilles had too much business on their hands, to be in a hurry about replying to letters which only concerned a daughter. Through the keyhole she sent back a lingering kiss of gratitude to her brother. Mlle. Ferray possessed in a supreme degree the gift of vague hopes, which consists in hoping something without knowing what. It seemed to her that this child, who had just fallen upon them from heaven, would play a fortunate rôle in their lives, that perhaps she would be the cause of her brother's renouncing his hatred of women, that she would reconcile him to happiness, to life, to glory, and to Arabic. How would this be brought about? As to that she knew nothing, and it disquieted her little. It is for Providence to find the how: that was the mission of Providence in this world.

III.

MLLE. FERRAY had taken upon herself no easy task; but she had the obstinate patience of sweet and loving souls, and,

like her late brother, that is to say like the Raymond of old, she undertook only difficult work. Meg was a skittish colt, ready to rear at a word or a gesture. The good Agatha undertook to subdue gradually this rebellious will, and to gently insinuate herself into the heart whose confidence and friendship she sought to win. She succeeded so well, that, in a little time, Meg came to her to confess all the preposterous things she had done, and all that she meditated; for, to prevent her doing such things, would have been as impossible as to imprison the moon in a well.

In order to obtain some slight concessions, Mlle. Ferray exacted but very little. It was her constant aim and her greatest anxiety to conceal from her brother Meg's peccadilloes and pranks, which would have caused him many exclamations of rage. He never suspected that one day this incorrigible child had plucked the most beautiful of his apples to bombard the passers-by, who had replied with a hail of stones. Barefoot, her hair flying in the wind, Meg had remained mistress of the battlefield: but the engagement had been severe, as the glass knocked out of the greenhouse bore witness. Raymond was equally ignorant of the fact that his sister had found Miss Rovel perched upon the summit of the hay-loft, where she was quietly smoking a cigarette. If Meg had set the house on fire, it would have been difficult to keep that calamity secret; but it is very sure that Mlle. Ferray would either have found some means of imputing the accident to herself, or that, in accordance with her usual formula, she would have exclaimed, "When one reflects upon it, all is explained; and, if the poor little girl promises not to do it again, we must forgive her."

But she could not conceal every thing from Raymond. He more than once surprised Miss Meg devastating his kitchen garden, under the pretext, that, nothing being so stupid as cabbages, they deserve to have their heads knocked off; and one day he caught her tormenting his especial pet, a beautiful Angora cat, and trying to attach a lantern to its tail. He was terribly enraged at the pretty mischief-doer; but Mlle. Ferray came hobbling along like the Prayers of Homer, celestial advocates, which, limping, squinting, march on the steps of crime to repair its ravages, and avert the anger of the gods.

Mlle. Ferray conversed a great deal with Miss Rovel, and these conversations left upon the good lady a singular impression: they both charmed and horrified her. She was frightened at the many things which Meg did not know,

and still more frightened at the many things she did know. Meg was grossly ignorant upon certain subjects, while upon others she possessed extraordinary knowledge, a science worthy of a doctor's hat, which she had caught upon the wing in her mother's *salon*. This young girl did not know how to knit or to embroider; she could neither hem a handkerchief, nor mark a napkin; and she understood far better how to disarrange a wardrobe than to arrange one. In truth, she knew how to read, but she had read nothing; she knew how to write, but she had a deplorable hand. Her literature was very limited, as well as her historical knowledge; she had heard vaguely of a Shakspeare who had composed a great many funny things, of a certain Charlemagne celebrated for the length of his beard, and of a man named Charles Stuart, king of England, who had had his head cut off. This last fact had seemed to interest her; she had sometimes thought of it in decapitating Raymond's cabbages. She was as well versed in geography as in history. In all these matters, she retained a few facts which amply sufficed her: for example, she was very proud to know that Spain is much hotter than England, while the former of these countries is situated somewhere in the environs of Africa. Mlle. Ferray having one day read "*Athalie*" to her, she found this comedy very interesting and very amusing. She even retained one line that had particularly impressed her, and often repeated that it is well

"De réparer des ans l'irréparable outrage."

In compensation for all she did not know, Meg knew that love is, according to the way one accepts it, the most agreeable of pleasures, or the most dangerous of passions. She explained very wisely to Mlle. Ferray what is understood in France by the *demi-monde*, and that it is a *patito* in Italy. She affirmed that marriage is an institution of the past, that "free unions" is the phrase of the future. She had at her fingers' ends a list of the friends of the heart of all the reigning sovereigns; and, when she recited this litany, one might have believed she was enumerating the saints of her calendar. She knew the scandalous adventures of the *pairie* as well as of the *gentry*, and the *Chronicle gallant* had no secrets for her.

This astounding erudition very justly disquieted Mlle. Ferray. But she soon discovered, that, in spite of appearances, Meg had remained very young, very childlike; that she was very *naïve* in her knowledge, that the adventures of Lord So-and-so and Duke Such-a-one were

for her like the fantastic tales of an old wife's library, which charmed her memory without her drawing from them any conclusion directly applicable to Miss Rovel, who for the moment preferred throwing apples to passers-by to all other pleasures. She also discovered that Meg had a noble pride that led her to set her person at a very high price; that there was a romantic turn to her imagination which protected her from vulgar temptations; and that she had a vast deal of good sense, thanks to which this *petite* individual could see clearly into the wiles of great and little deceivers.

"In default of better things," said Mlle. Ferray to herself, "a heart which has sufficient self-esteem to bestow itself only on condition that it is fully appreciated, an exacting imagination ambitious of putting some beauty into life, a mind just and courageous, resolved to be the dupe of nothing or nobody, are three railings capable of preserving from more than one fall." Without contradiction, principles only are reliable; but, if Lady Rovel would only grant her fifteen months, Mlle. Ferray felt confident she could instil these principles into Meg's mind, although the idea appeared as chimerical as to make gourds grow upon a rock destitute of vegetable earth.

She tried to do this, never preaching morality to Meg, listening with both ears to all her stories, appearing scandalized at nothing, contenting herself with insinuating, that, from one point of view, all things can be justified; that the essential thing is to well know what one wishes, and to accept in advance the consequences of one's actions, for the reason that every decisive action has its inevitable consequences, and, once entered into, it is no longer we who control our life: it is that act that controls us. All the paths leading to happiness or unhappiness, she said, start from the same intersecting point. It is well to reflect a long time before making one's choice, for these paths which at first seem contiguous, become so divergent that it is impossible, upon repenting our choice, to turn from one to the other. In vain we find that we have been deceived: we must go on to the goal of our error and of our misfortune.

Happily, added she, to prevent our making a precipitate choice, kind Nature has placed at the starting-point a magic fountain environed by delicious shades, under which it is sweet to rest. The water of this fountain insures to him who drinks it charming dreams, a joyous intoxication; he believes that he perceives in himself something stronger than destiny, more happy than happiness itself; so that, absorbed in the enjoyment of this life-dream, he does not

hurry on to grasp another. This fountain is youth; and Mlle. Ferray exhorted Meg to remain young a long time, because youth is the only thing of which one never repents. Meg had delight enough in this wisdom and in this fountain; but she little realized this, although she tried to make Mlle. Ferray believe that her conversation and reflections might leave some decisive impressions upon her refractory nature.

If Meg talked a great deal with Mlle. Ferray, she exchanged at the most three words a day with Raymond, whom she seldom saw except at meal-time. Raymond took no pains to conceal his resentment at Miss Rovel's installation into his house, or the impatience with which he awaited the moment of despatching her to the Antilles. From day to day, his liking for her grew less; and he often repeated to his sister that this little girl was a perverse child, who needed to be governed with the utmost severity. To tell the truth, Meg did nothing to please him. She saw in him a gentleman very morose, and somewhat mysterious, who overawed her in spite of herself. The instinctive antipathy with which he had inspired her changed, ere long, to a well-grounded aversion, the results of which we shall see.

Mlle. Ferray had flattered herself, that, by reciting to Meg her allegory of the enchanted fountain, she should persuade her to wear short presses a while longer. But the allegory had produced no such sovereign effect. Every day Meg reminded Mlle. Ferray of her promise: she became so urgent that it had to be fulfilled. Mlle. Ferray conducted her *protégée* to Geneva, and took her to a fashionable shop; where, after long discussion, they chose a grayish-rose silk, with which Meg decided to content herself, although she would have preferred a more showy color. Thence she was transported to the best dressmaker of the town, with whom they discussed for a long time the great question of the fashionable styles of cutting and trimming. Meg expected her first long dress to be a *chef-d'œuvre*. She at last entered into possession of this treasure. The next morning she rose at dawn, and passed several hours in trailing her new attire up and down the room, going, coming, making her skirts spread out, proud of her gimps and laces, and giving herself a wry neck in contemplating the train. She sighed for the breakfast hour. As soon as the bell rang, she rushed precipitately to the dining-room, which she crossed with her nose in the air, her waist wriggling, her arms swinging, her head tossing. Raymond, who had just entered by another door, stopped short to gaze at her, and with a shrug of the

shoulders said to his sister, "Are you mad, Agatha, to bundle up that little girl in this absurd way?" This ill-sounding exclamation seemed to Meg the most downright impertinence. But she succeeded in keeping silence, and in smiling loftily like a person who hears a silly thing uttered, and disdains to reply. From this day she meditated profoundly upon means of proving to Monsieur Ferray that he was a senseless gosling, and that, since Miss Rovel wore long dresses, it was due to her that the whole universe should take it seriously. Fortune, which is often the obliging accomplice of little girls, furnished her the occasion she sought.

Meg often promenaded in the environs of The Hermitage, accompanied by Pamela. While Meg sought for hazelnuts, and cracked them with her beautiful teeth, the negress would let her melancholy glances wander far over the fields, indulging at intervals in the amorous cooings of the turtle-dove, or in profound sighs which were a petition to destiny. Although she had a flat nose, Pamela had long ago decided that she was a treasure unrecognized by the world. This pearl was impatiently waiting the connoisseur who should render it justice. Perhaps it might one day sparkle on the finger of a prince; for Pamela, having seen more than one prince at the disposal of Lady Rovel, had persuaded herself that princes are a common article of merchandise, and that, sooner or later, she should have hers. The imagination of this romantic negress denied itself nothing.

Meg's favorite walk was a narrow, shady path, where more nuts grew than elsewhere: it bordered upon a ravine which descended precipitately to the Arne. Arrived upon the borders of the ravine, Meg would indulge in some very hazardous gambols, taking pleasure in frightening Pamela by her temerity. When she had tired of this, they would return to the house. One day, turning her head, she perceived a stranger some fifty steps behind her. She stopped to gaze at him: he also paused, seemingly to look for a pin in the grass. She resumed her walk: he followed. Arrived at the end of the path, she turned around: the stranger leaned against a tree, and was waiting for her to pass. He was a small, middle-aged man, frightfully lean; his pinched neck was encircled by a sky-blue cravat; his fingers were covered with rings; his eyebrows, hair, and moustache were dyed: he had a ferret-like nose, with the dull eyes of a dead fish suddenly galvanized into life. At the moment when Meg passed him, he threw upon her the glance of a faun on the watch for a nymph. Seeing that

his dilated pupils spoke too much, he extinguished them as one blows out a candle, and greeted Meg with the paternal kindness of a graybeard who loves children.

The next day Miss Rovel had not been ten minutes in this path, when the unknown appeared, and resumed the rôle of yesterday: it was the same upon the next day. The fourth day Meg, who began to be perplexed, and who was not the girl to repose upon her curiosity, adroitly managed to drop her fan in the grass, thus furnishing the stranger the pretext for which he had watched. A moment after, he had approached, and, bowing to the ground, presented her the fan.

"May I know your name, beautiful young lady?" he asked with a smile that was like a grimace.

Meg drew herself up with great dignity. "Monsieur," she replied haughtily, "I am not in the habit of revealing my name to people who have not told me theirs."

"I am called the Marquis de Boisgenêt," stammered the old beau. "And I," replied Meg, christening herself with the first name that came into her head. "I am called Miss Marvellous." Whereupon, as he pressed her with questions, she explained to him, that for more than a month her mother had dwelt in a cleft of the Bernina, that she herself had been placed to board at a house they called The Hermitage, and which was about as dull as the crevice of a mountain; that they treated her severely because she was possessed of a very lively disposition. She added, moreover, that in front of this house there was an orchard; that at the foot of this orchard there was a brook where she sometimes angled for craw-fish; but, the weather now being severe, she found in this brook fewer craw-fish than pebbles. Monsieur de Boisgenêt hung upon her lips; he did not lose a word; he liked to be informed.

Then he implored Meg to allow him to walk a few steps with her; and, lowering his voice, he declared, that, the first time he had seen her, her beauty had possessed an inexpressible attraction for him; he had been, as it were, bewitched by it, and had been roaming up and down the entrance of the path in the hope of finding her there again. He averred that this path was his paradise, and that Meg was his angel, — one of those angels of whom one dares demand nothing but permission to adore them upon his knees.

Meg, who had not as yet perceived wings or pinions sprouting beneath her armpits, replied to this ethereal declaration by one of those loud bursts of a little girl's laughter, which have the effrontery and the shrillness of a cock's

crow. This laugh somewhat vexed the amorous graybeard. He dropped his metaphors, and implored Meg to make him a present of that naughty paper fan he had just handed back to her. "It would be for me a priceless jewel," he said; "and you will permit me to offer you another in exchange."

"An angelic fan?" asked she, elevating her chin. "Bring it along; my heart will appreciate it."

And, attempting to imitate a Juno-like movement of the head which often served her mother to break off an interview too much prolonged, she took leave of M. de Boisgenêt, who had the discretion not to follow her.

The numerous adorers of Lady Rovel had sometimes offered Meg bonbons and dolls. None of them had ever seemed to doubt that she was an angel; none had failed to admire her black eyes and her blonde hair. Treated until now as a child, she had for the first time become the object of a declaration. It was an event in her life. Such are the miracles wrought by long dresses! Returning with rapid pace to The Hermitage, she said to herself, "What would you think of this adventure, Monsieur Raymond Ferray? Ah! truly it seems to me that this little girl bundled up in so absurd a fashion makes people fall in love with her without having even to lift her finger!"

She walked so rapidly that the negress could not follow her. Pamela, meantime, was curious to know what had passed between her young mistress and the stranger. She had listened without understanding a word, as M. de Boisgenêt spoke very low; and, when he spoke loud, she understood no better, because she knew only English.

"Do not walk so fast, mademoiselle," she said to Meg. "One would think we had the Devil at our heels."

"It is the Devil, very likely, or one of his imps," replied Meg.

"He, mademoiselle! He has so polite an air, this gentleman; so amiable, so gallant!"

"He pleases you, then, Pamela?"

"He has very grand manners. Maybe he is a prince."

"Don't be so absurd; he is only a marquis."

"And I would like to know" —

"Oh, don't ask me."

"What is there to tell, mademoiselle?" asked Pamela in a reproachful tone. "Until to-day, you have had no secrets from me."

"In truth, I don't know as I ought to tell you. I am placed in a very delicate position, Pamela," she added with an important and solemn air. "Really, I have some scruples in regard to deliver-

ing the message the Marquis de Boisgenêt has sent you through me."

"For me!" cooed the negress, bridling up with self-importance.

"Yes, for you. As he does not know English, he implored me to say to you that he is desperately enamoured of your charms; that they are robbing him of his appetite and of the little hair yet remaining to him. He asked me how he should manage to persuade you of his love. I told him that you had a poetic soul, entirely detached from the things of this world; that you floated in ethereal regions; that you despised gold, silver, and jewels."

"You need not have gone so far, mademoiselle," interrupted the negress excitedly; "a pretty jewel never did anybody harm."

"That is also his opinion," replied Meg; "and to-morrow he will offer you, through me, a little present which he says is worthy of an angel; for you are his angel. It seems that there are black angels."

"Why not? Color has nothing to do with such things; here is a proof of that," replied Pamela a little piqued.

Meg said no more; she left Pamela to her reflections, in which that day and the following night she indulged, oblivious of all around her. The next day Pamela had a moment of disquietude, when, arriving at the well-known path, she did not perceive the marquis. However, just as with Meg she had reached the crest of the ravine, she recognized the laggard coming towards them as fast as his little legs could bring him. Meg made a sign to her credulous *soubrette* to withdraw to a little distance, and received M. de Boisgenêt with a very grand air. He hastened to present her a charming case, which contained a very beautiful mother-of-pearl fan mounted in ivory, and garnished with brilliants. Meg unfolded it, and said, "It is really in very good taste. The angel accepts it."

"But there was to be an exchange," murmured M. de Boisgenêt in his most flute-like voice.

"I forgot my paper fan, and left it at home," she replied. "And, even if I held it in my hand, you should not have it."

"Ah, cruel girl!" cried he; "is it thus you amuse yourself with promises?"

"Ask something else of me. What can one do to be agreeable to you?"

"What can one do?" stammered the marquis. "Dare I tell you the dream I had last night,—the dream which has haunted, possessed me, all day?"

"Oh, tell it!" replied she. "If your dream does not please me, I shall not listen to it."

"I dreamed that I was walking, one

evening, alone with you, in this path here by moonlight. To tell you what intoxication took possession of my soul"—He broke off here to explain to her that he adored the moon; that to contemplate it with a beloved woman was, in his eyes, the most ineffable of felicities.

"I do not love the moon so much as all that," replied she with disdainful lips. "Monsieur Ferray was the other day explaining to his sister that the moon is a dead region, so dead that it no longer knows how to turn on its own axis; and that nothing is stirring there,—an old carcass of a world. He is a great pedant, Monsieur Ferray, and the pedants murder poetry; but then, since you think so much of it"—

"Oh that I had a throne!" interrupted he. "I would give it without regret to realize my dream."

"So be it," replied she. "If you will be, when the moon rises to-night, at the iron gate before The Hermitage, I will try to join you there, and you shall explain the moon to me."

M. de Boisgenêt was seized with such a transport of delight, that he would have fallen at Meg's knees; but she bethought herself of a certain gesture with which her mother cut off the thread of her discourse to an indiscreet person who forgot himself. She copied it so exactly, M. de Boisgenêt repressed his enthusiasm, and allowed himself to depart with only these words, "O my angel, this evening!"

During the interview, he had thrown more than one unquiet glance upon Pamela, whose presence annoyed him somewhat. Pamela had thought that she read in these glances the sweet madness of an enamoured heart, and had replied by modestly lowering her eyes. But yet the transport of the marquis had not escaped her, and she could not avoid saying to Meg, "It seems to me, mademoiselle, that M. de Boisgenêt was very affectionate with you."

"He wanted to embrace me," replied Meg, "because, after he had for a long time entreated me, I consented to speak to you in his favor. Listen, Pamela," continued she in a dogmatic tone, "this is the last time I shall intrude in this affair. You are old enough to know how to conduct yourself. Do not ask advice of me: I shall not give it." And, presenting the fan, she added, "Here is a pretty gew-gaw, which the poor man presents you with his homage, and on condition that this evening you walk with him an hour by moonlight, for he has a pronounced weakness for the moon. I advise you to be prudent and wary. I could cite you numerous examples of women of humble estate who, by judiciously managing their

lovers, have succeeded in marrying them at last. Madame la Marchioness Pamela de Boisgenêt,—it seems to me that sounds well.”

“I thank you for your good advice,” replied Pamela with a touch of hauteur; “but I believe I know how to take care of myself.”

And for five minutes she played with the fan, which she thrust dexterously into her pocket on arriving at The Hermitage.

The moon in its fullest radiance rose above the mountains. Meg extinguished her lamp, drew back the curtain, half opened the shutter, and leaned out of the window, her elbows resting on the sill. She was sure of seeing and of not being seen. She soon discerned a shadow flitting up and down before the gate. The clock of the neighboring village had just struck ten, when, to her lively satisfaction, the youthful watcher heard the creaking of a door opened with great precaution, and a second phantom appeared. It traversed the court, and passed along the fence. Meg could scarce refrain from a burst of laughter. She represented to herself the scene about to be enacted, the despair, the anger of M. de Boisgenêt when, in place of the angel of light he expected, he should find himself in the presence of a negress with a flat nose. Poor Pamela was going to be ill received, and hastily dismissed. Meg promised herself a great many jests upon this misadventure, and much sport in toasting Pamela as the Marquise de Boisgenêt.

Pamela, finding the front gate locked, had reached a small private gate fastened by a bolt. She shoved back the bolt, and a moment after was outside the yard, gazing around for her Romeo. She was not doomed to wait. He advanced hastily and with open arms. All of a sudden he recoiled, and said in French, “Was Miss Marvellous prevented from coming?”

Pamela cooed in English, “She has told me all: I had pity on your sufferings.”

“Will she come, or will she not come?” he resumed excitedly.

“I compromise for your sake an unsullied character,” cooed Pamela anew. “I dare believe that you will respect it.”

M. de Boisgenêt happened to know some English words, and it was in this language that he exclaimed, “What means this substitution? Would she make sport of me?”

Both remained for an instant speechless, seeking to recover from their mutual astonishment. But the *denoûment* was not quite what Meg had expected. Silence is often more eloquent than speech. After a pause of some seconds, the marquis again approached Pamela, and they

talked in a voice so low that not a word reached Meg. Then the two shadows began to move, and soon vanished in the distance.

No words could express Miss Rovel’s consternation. She could scarce believe her eyes. Despite her profound knowledge of the things of this world, she was utterly confounded. She passed the remainder of the night hovering between an almost irrepressible desire to give way to the laughter that trembled on her lips, and the dumb resentment that raged in her heart. It seemed to her, that, during these last few moments, she had come to learn a great deal of the human heart; her newly acquired science at the same time amused and angered her. She thought of Mlle. Ferray’s allegories, and was obliged to confess to herself, that, instead of playing jokes upon old marquises, young girls would do better to drink at that magic fountain which mirrors heaven and earth, investing all with the graces of enchantment. She could not lie down; she awaited Pamela, eager for her return. But her curiosity was not to be gratified. Pamela did not return.

The next day Mlle. Ferray, astonished at the disappearance of the negress, asked what had become of her. Meg feigned ignorance.

“I suppose,” said Mlle. Ferray, “that the girl was *ennuyé* here, and has gone elsewhere to seek her fortune. I am delighted; I can have no regrets at your loss of her society.”

“The girl is lacking neither in wit nor in *savoir faire*,” replied Meg. Then she started off on the run to finish her angling for craw-fish in the brook. Her fishing was so successful that long hours passed without her thinking of M. de Boisgenêt or of his philosophy; but the next day her curiosity returned. She said to herself that Geneva was not a large city, that in an hour, at most, one could make the tour of it; and that there at some street corner she might meet a pair of high, soot-colored cheek-bones.

Raymond had a horse which served two purposes; as a carriage-horse for his sister, and a saddle-horse for himself. After breakfast when he had entered his study, and Mlle. Ferray had retired to her chamber for a siesta, Meg furtively donned her riding-habit, and, descending to the stable, with her own hands she saddled and bridled the horse, unobserved by any one. A quarter of an hour’s riding at full speed brought her to the gates of Geneva. She galloped over the whole town, and was so occupied in her search that she did not perceive the curious glances cast upon her by all she met. Every one was astonished to see this beautiful blonde riding alone without groom or chaperon. Her investigations

ended in nothing; no Pamela was to be found. The hours were passing, and she was forced to set out on her return to The Hermitage without any satisfaction of her curiosity.

She was only half a kilometre from the house, when she heard the gallop of a horse behind her. She turned her head, and recognized M. de Boisgenêt mounted upon a Moorish roan. With one hand he gave her a menacing gesture, with the other he flung her a kiss; then he put spurs to his horse so as to reach her. She did not try to escape him; and, two seconds after, he had caught up with her. "Ah, you little rogue," he cried, "you shall pay me for this!" And, so saying, he extended his left arm to clasp her around the waist. She quickly disengaged herself; and, before he could be on his guard, with a vigorous blow of her riding-whip she sent his hat bounding down the dusty road. Surprise for a moment held him spellbound; then madened with resentment or love, without really knowing what he was about, he hurried in pursuit of the fugitive.

Far better mounted than she, he was rapidly gaining upon her, when a pedestrian who had witnessed the scene darted from behind a hedge. Seizing the Moorish roan by the bridle, he stopped him in his mad career. M. de Boisgenêt ordered the intruder to let go his hold, and brandished his riding-whip; but, with his right hand, the intruder seized him around the waist. It seemed to the little man that the hand that held him was of iron. He was not deceived; that hand plucked him from his saddle as if he had been a flower; and a moment after, without knowing how, he found himself seated on a mile-post, while his horse galloped away.

"Give me your card, monsieur," he cried, clinching his fists.

"Here it is, sir," replied, with a sardonic smile, the pedestrian, who was no other than Raymond.

"You will hear from me in a few hours from now," resumed Monsieur de Boisgenêt. So saying, he withdrew, turning to transfix Raymond with a glance which portended death or something very like it.

At Raymond's approach, Meg had stopped in her flight. She had seen all and comprehended all. The pedant, M. Ferray, had all at once become transfigured before her eyes into a hero of romance, into a paladin. She was in a transport of admiration at his prowess, the vigor of his arm, at his marvellous *sang froid*. She had been vividly impressed by the lightnings that flashed from his eyes when he had darted upon M. de Boisgenêt, and also by the contemptuous smile with which he had greeted the little man after having

seated him on the top of the mile-post. In short, he had appeared to her to admirable advantage in this encounter. She had allowed herself to slide from her saddle to the ground; and, when Raymond joined her, he led her horse by the bridle, and she walked along by her liberator's side.

"Monsieur," said she to him in a trembling voice, "this man has threatened to send his seconds to you."

"That is true, mademoiselle."

"And will you fight each other?"

"Why not?" replied Raymond calmly.

"I do not wish it!" cried Meg. "I will not allow it!" and she burst out sobbing.

If Raymond had just astonished Miss Rovel, at this moment Miss Rovel astonished Raymond. He gazed at her, his great eyes wide open from wonder, and these eyes had an unwonted, an almost kindly expression. He had just discovered that Meg possessed something resembling a heart, and he pitied her distress.

"Calm yourself, Miss Rovel," he said in a rather mild voice.

"I want to tell you all," said she, drying her eyes; and thereupon she gave an exact detail of what had passed between her and M. de Boisgenêt. Then she added, "If I have been light-headed, it is I who must suffer the consequences; if M. de Boisgenêt absolutely wishes to fight, he must fight with me. Do not think I am afraid of a sword-thrust: I assure you that I do not fear it at all."

Raymond smiled. "I very much doubt," said he, "if M. de Boisgenêt would accept a duel on these conditions. But dismiss this subject, I pray you," added he with a grave air: "I have a communication to make to you to which I invite your most serious attention. It seems clear to me, Miss Rovel, that your mother has abandoned you."

"Abandoned me! Do you call this abandoning me?" cried Meg impetuously, and gazing at him with flaming eyes. Her glance said, "How can you declare, that, in confiding me to your protection and that of your sister, my mother has abandoned me?"

"However that may be," replied he, "I wrote six weeks ago to your father, asking him what I should do with you. I have just received his reply." He drew from his pocket a letter, only the last lines of which he read to Meg. The whole letter was as follows:—

"Sir John Rovel, governor and commander-in-chief of Barbadoes, has the honor to testifying to M. Ferray his sympathy for the trouble Lady Rovel has caused him in confiding to his care, without previous arrangement, the education of her

daughter, a child who, in truth, it will not be easy to educate.

"On the other hand, it would be very inconvenient to Sir John Rovel to have M. Ferray despatch Meg to the Antilles. When Sir John Rovel separated from the amiable Lady Rovel, he kept with him their son William, and authorized Lady Rovel to take the daughter with her to Europe. Moreover, Sir John Rovel is not so assured of being Meg's father as to be very desirous for her return; and it is a principle of his, to avoid, as much as possible, all disagreeable impressions. But still he feels it his duty to provide for the girl's future. He has therefore deposited with Messrs. Barker & Co., bankers, in London, a sum of twelve thousand pounds sterling, which, principal and interest, will serve for Meg's dowry when she marries, and which is all she can expect from him.

"Until she marries, in case Lady Rovel does not come back to claim her, Sir John Rovel implores M. Ferray to consider himself Meg's guardian; and, if it is not convenient to have her remain in his house, he requests him to place her in such a boarding-school as pleases him, and to charge to the account of Barker & Co. all the expenses of her maintenance.

"Sir John Rovel eagerly embraces this opportunity of expressing to M. Ferray sentiments of the most perfect esteem, and implores him to inform him of the suitor to whom he will resign Miss Meg, and who has his approbation in advance."

"You see, Miss Rovel," added Raymond, after having finished his reading, "that your father wishes me to marry you to some one. Your dowry, although not enormous, makes you a very desirable match."

Meg interrupted him with a gesture which would fain have said, "Look at my eyes and my hair: it seems to me that these are worth a little more than my dowry." Raymond affected not to understand. "Have you any bridegroom in view?" asked he.

"Mamma," replied Meg as gravely as he, "has often said before me, that marriage is a folly which love only can excuse. When I love, perhaps I shall marry."

"Very well, mademoiselle. In this case, please let me know what boarding-school you desire to enter."

"Ah, monsieur! will you drive me away from you?" she replied passionately, and her eyes filled with tears.

Raymond saw that she was all ready to break out into sobs. He pitied her. "Miss Rovel," said he, "a person whom I tenderly love has dedicated to you an ardent affection, which, I must confess,

has seemed to me most unfortunately bestowed. In consideration for her, I consent to keep you a while longer in my house; but it is on condition, that in future you listen somewhat less to your fantasies, that in all things you take the advice of my sister, and that you carefully shun compromising the repose and dignity of my house by your thoughtlessness."

Without leaving her time to reply, Raymond bowed to her, and went to his own room. Scarce had he left, when, like a bomb, Meg precipitated herself into Mlle. Ferray's apartments, to pour forth her heart on that tender bosom. Her pathetic recital caused the good Agatha some tears. She knew that of all men her brother would be the least disposed to yield a foot's breadth in order to shun an unpleasantness or a danger. Still she considered that M. de Boisgenêt could scarcely demand satisfaction from a guardian for having protected his ward against him, and that the ludicrousness of his adventure would prevent his wishing to push the affair further.

While chiding her young friend, she endeavored to re-assure her, but only half succeeded. Meg could not sleep that night. She passed the next day in mortal terror. Whenever she heard the door-bell ring, she grew pale, expecting to see the seconds of M. de Boisgenêt appear. Happily, they did not appear that day, nor the day following. Meg was so reassured and so happy that she would gladly have fallen upon Raymond's neck; but this was not a thing to attempt. Nevertheless she must satisfy her heart; and, as she crossed the garden, she impressed an ardent kiss upon a great pear-tree which has never comprehended the reason why.

That evening, upon retiring, a regret came to her. She began to think, that, if the duel had taken place, it would have been glorious to her. People might have said, that at scarce sixteen years of age, and in her first long dress, two men had sought to cut each other's throats for her beautiful eyes. It was understood, that was a self-evident fact, that Raymond would come safe and sound out of the engagement. And yet if he had received the merest slash, even the simplest scratch, what would the world have thought of Miss Rovel, and her brilliant fashion of making her *début* in the great world? And who knows if there would not have resulted from this — what then? Here Miss Meg's imagination became a little confused. It seemed to her that this scratch might have had the most momentous consequences for her; but she went to sleep before arriving at the end of her story, which was very complicated.

IV.

HER adventure with M. de Boisgenêt, and the very peremptory warning she had received from M. Raymond Ferray, had proved a good lesson for Miss Rovel. She grew cautious, she formed a habit of reflecting a little, and for some time her conduct as well as her language was irreproachable. But one day she forgot herself. Pamela suddenly re-appeared at The Hermitage. This negress possessed the effrontery of those unconscious beings who know not what they do, and still less what they have done; she hoped to find pardon, and to be re-established in her office of waiting-maid. Raymond overwhelmed her with astonishment in begging her to leave as soon as possible. She alleged that Lady Rovel had confided the care of her daughter to her, that it was her duty to remain with Miss Meg. Meg, who perhaps felt some remorse on her part, ventured to plead Pamela's cause, and she plead with considerable warmth.

"Very well, Miss Rovel," said Raymond with an icy air; "this girl will not remain here a minute longer, but you are free to accompany her."

These words sufficed to silence Meg. The idea of leaving The Hermitage froze her heart. It would have been very hard for her to separate from Mlle. Ferray; perhaps it would have cost her more to leave Raymond. This pedant, in whom she believed she had discovered a paladin, had thrown a charm over her. In spite of his rudeness, his coldness, his disdain, he had a mysterious attraction for her youthful imagination. She studied him secretly as one searches into an interesting problem. When she had nothing better to do, she said to herself, "What sort of a man is this, now?"

One November day after breakfast, Raymond had shut himself up in the library with his sister. He had just finished the translation of Book IV. of *De Rerum Natura*, and was reciting some passages to Mlle. Ferray, his natural auditor. Among them were that eloquent arraignment of passion, that vivid description of the bitternesses which love conceals, of the remorse and chagrin that accompany it, of the incurable jealousy of the accepted lover who believes that he reads in an abstracted glance the reveries of a faithless or divided soul, and surprises upon the treacherous lips traces of a smile which is not for him. "One cannot too well veil his heart," concludes the poet; "for it is easier not to love at all than to cease to love, and to break the ties with which Venus has bound us."

Borne onward by the torrent of his recitation, Raymond did not perceive

that Miss Rovel had glided clandestinely into the bay-window of the library, where, holding her breath, she did not lose a word. When he had ended, thrusting her head between the two wings of the curtain, she cried thoughtlessly, —

"Monsieur Ferray, who, then, was this Lucretius who loved women so little? The Duke de B. understood them better than he. One day he addressed a letter to mamma in verse, where he compared the fools who revile love to those drinkers who, upon awaking in the morning, abuse the bottle. One may be sure that in the evening they will be under the table. They were charming, — these verses of the Duke de B. I remember only the four last lines, —

"*L'amour m'aura toujours parmi ses paroisiens,
Et je ne suis point né d'humeur atrabillaire,
La femme, à mon avis, est le premier des biens,
Ou, si le bien est rare, un mal très nécessaire.*"*

"On the contrary, Miss Rovel, there is an evil which appears to me not at all necessary: it is a little girl who intrudes to listen to what she has not at all been asked to hear, and to give her opinion at random, where no one has asked for it."

At these words, having put his manuscript back into his pocket, he angrily withdrew.

Meg did not take offence at this insult: she perceived her fault, and with a contrite air she listened to a lecture from Mlle. Ferray, who demonstrated to her that she had missed a very good opportunity for being silent.

"It is the fault of Lucretius," replied Meg, "and of his impertinences which revolted me. It is droll: I had always believed that this Lucretius was a woman."

"My pretty dear," replied Mlle. Ferray, "one is not permitted to confound a great Roman poet with the wife of Collatin" —

"Who had an adventure so singular that she took it for high tragedy," interrupted Meg; "but this matters little to me. I want to know why Monsieur Ferray detests women so much."

"Where have you learned, Meg, that my brother detests women?"

"Oh, don't tell me he does not! He doesn't let an occasion escape him to declare that fact. You may be sure, that, if he cannot endure me, it is my sex that displeases him far more than my character. Good heavens! I do not say that I

* "Love will always have me among its parishioners;

I am not born of an atra-billious humor. — Woman, in my opinion, is the first of blessings, Or, if the good are rare, a very necessary evil."

am perfect; but with all my faults, if I had the honor of being a boy, he could more easily endure me. Mademoiselle Agatha, do be good for just once, and tell me what it is that women must have done to Monsieur Ferray. You know that I adore stories."

Mlle. Ferray, only after many entreaties, began the recital Meg demanded. She finally yielded to her supplications, because it was hard for her never to speak to any one of that which held the first place in her heart. She told to Meg, under the seal of secrecy, of Raymond's love-affair with Mme. de P., of Arabia, of Mecca, of the return to Paris. Meg listened with open mouth and eyes.

"And so," cried she, "because Mme. de P. has failed to keep her word with him, Mousieur Ferray has sworn to end his days in a hole. Do not gaze at me with such staring eyes, mademoiselle! It is a charming hole, I confess; but any one who is acquainted with it will tell you it is a hole. Monsieur Ferray would have shown better sense in setting himself deliberately about loving another woman. Mamma, who believes in homœopathy, has often told me that one passion is cured only by another passion. I would give a great deal to know Mme. de P."

Mlle. Ferray revealed to her that she had fraudulently gained possession of a miniature of Mme. de P. During his illness, Raymond had ordered her to burn it, and the letters also; but this miniature was so charming, that, unknown to her brother, she had done him the favor of keeping it. At Meg's earnest entreaties, she consented to bring it to her. Meg examined the picture critically, then she said, "In truth, she is not very bad with her pretty, irregular face, and yet she is nothing remarkable. As mamma says, she is of that small beauty which has its full value only by candle-light. Great beauty is that which can do without all little precautions, that which gains by being seen in broad daylight." And at these words she placed herself erect before Mlle. Ferray, her face turned toward the setting sun, to which she seemed to say, "I have no fear of you." "Now, upon your word and honor," added she, "who do you think the prettiest, — Madame de P. or I?"

Mlle. Ferray began to laugh. "Meg, give me back that picture at once," she said; "you had best go and jump the rope."

This conversation had wrought a great impression upon Miss Rovel. I do not know what was her idea, as she did not impart it to any one; but from that day she renounced all her mischievous pranks, and assumed a grave deportment, as much so, at least, as the vivacity of her

disposition allowed. She spoke little, she was discreet in her questions, and was all her best friend could wish her to be. Another more remarkable change was that she became suddenly cured of her horror of books. She borrowed from Mlle. Ferray a manual of astronomy and a work upon physical geography, and passed her mornings in studying them. She found here many things she did not understand, many others which astonished her. She wrote down a list of her astonishments, and one afternoon she went and knocked at Raymond's door. He was very much surprised to see her enter, and seat herself tranquilly near him, saying that a great many strange events were taking place in the heavens and upon the earth, and that she hoped he would be kind enough to explain them to her. Without allowing herself to be intimidated by his ironical smiles, she implored him to tell her how one was really going to assure one's self that light moves more than eighty thousand leagues a second; she also imparted to him the extreme difficulty she had always experienced in believing that the world was round, and that there were at the antipodes people who walked upon their heads. Raymond tried to jest with her, to put her off; but by her air of respectful attention Meg constrained him to answer her inquiries, and the interview lasted almost half an hour.

"I do not wish to trouble you longer to-day," she said, taking leave of him; "but would you be so very good as to allow me to come sometimes to question you? I am a goose or a ninny, just as you please, and I shall not be sorry to improve myself a little."

"But what good can this do you, Miss Rovel?" he asked. "You have handsome eyes, and a dowry of three hundred thousand francs; with such advantages, a woman is released from all the cares of this world. Question the Duke de B., who makes such pretty verses; you will see that he is of my opinion."

"The Duke de B. is not here," replied she, "and I care little for his observations. I have often heard mamma say, that a woman is an actress, who, in playing her *rôle*, must accommodate herself to the taste of her public. My public is you: I know that you despise ignorant young girls; and it is my desire that you despise me no more."

"What interest can you have in pleasing me?" he replied smiling. "Since you love to quote your mother, know that she one day in four languages called me an ill-trained bear. I am a boor, Miss Rovel, — one of those boors whose minds are all awry, one of that sort whom man nor woman no longer pleases."

"This is the judgment I at first passed

upon you," replied she ingenuously; "but since I have seen you take a little monsieur by the waist, and deliberately set him on a curb-stone, my ideas in regard to you have changed. In short, I shall not be sorry, if, at a future day, you come to entertain some friendship for me."

"As to that, Miss Rovel," answered Raymond, conducting her to the door of his study, "I dare not promise the fulfilment of your wish; but be assured that I recognize your good intentions."

Whatever Meg wished, she wished very much; she had an indomitable tenacity of character. Braving the rebuffs and the mockeries of Raymond, through the strength and persistence of her entreaties, she won his consent to direct her reading. He gave her successively works upon science, travels, and histories, all of which she studied with great care; then, as at first, she went and knocked at his study-door, asking to talk with him. He at first received her ungraciously enough, like a man who feels disturbed and annoyed; but, little by little, he began to enjoy her visits and her questions. She had a clear and limpid intelligence; her ignorance resembled those mountain-lakes which, with marvellous precision, reflect their shores, the sky, and the shifting forms of the clouds. We can detest the world, and still take some pleasure in seeing it reflected in that wonderful mirror we call a woman's mind, when she has a well-formed mind, whose transparency has not been dimmed by prejudice or vanity. When Raymond received her ill, Meg said to him without being in the least disconcerted, "I see, monsieur, that you are in an ill humor to-day. I will return to-morrow."

She deciphered his face at the first glance. If he was out of humor, she was reserved in her discourse, or even succeeded in keeping silence for entire hours; if he was well disposed, she gave loose rein to her tongue, and amused him by her audacity or her candor. He for some time resisted the charm that was leading him on; but he had soon to admit that Meg's society had become agreeable to him; that he loved to occupy himself with her, that she helped him fill the void of time. Hitherto, gardening had been his favorite amusement. At the end of a few weeks, his rosebushes and his orchard seemed less interesting than the beautiful human plant whose education chance had confided to his care. This wild scion, in laying claim to his good offices, said to him, "Graft me: I wish you to find me to your inclination, and hope that one day you will take pleasure in my fruits."

To palliate his inconsistency, and to cover his defeat, Raymond fell into a

habit of saying that Miss Rovel was only a little girl; that, at her age, one has no sex. He had secretly decided, that, upon the day when he should see the child giving place to the woman, he would abjure her society; but he did not wish to do so immediately. Meg was careful to reassure him in this respect. If she had renounced her frolicsome pranks, she had at the same time abandoned all her pretensions. She made no more parade of her precocious worldly science; she abstained from citing the apothegms of her mother, and the versicles of the Duke de B. She indulged in no further dissertations upon love and upon mankind in general. This came perhaps from the fact that young girls speak little of love when they begin to love, and occupy themselves less with the world when their hearts first speak. The bird's song which, breaking the silence, announces to them the advent of the Messiah, holds them under its charm; and the pleasure of listening gives them a distaste for the pleasure of speaking. And all this while, Meg so much loved sugar-plums, barberries, and sour apples, to play at ninepins, to fish, to jump the rope, that Raymond might well be permitted to doubt the fact that she had in her head a romance of which he was the hero.

The winter was cold and snowy. To please Miss Rovel, Raymond purchased a sleigh. It was she who conducted it. They went at full speed, and were often upset. Raymond took these misadventures mildly. One day Meg, having fallen head-first into a drift, rose so powdered with snow, that Raymond was convulsed with merriment. Mlle. Ferray, who was of the party, was inclined to throw herself upon his neck; it was the first time in two years that she had heard him laugh. He felt some mortification for this transport, and was morose for four and twenty hours. He had made a god of his chagrin; and he was indignant that the priest had dared laugh in his own church.

During the long evenings of this long winter, instead of confining himself in his study to translate Lucretius, he descended to the parlor, and read aloud Homer, Plutarch, or some tragedy. Meg liked "The Iliad" far better than "The Odyssey." She found it very natural and very interesting that two peoples should fight ten years for the beautiful eyes of a coquette; she had for a long time known that this is the foundation of all history. On the other hand, she had scarce persuaded herself how a hardy adventurer could wantonly sacrifice Circe, Calypso, and the Sirens, to seek again his arid rocky domain, and the rather superannuated charms of his Penelope; she allowed

herself to believe, that, on this point, Homer had imposed upon his readers. Plutarch left her cold; she reproached him with too much praise of great men who had not been handsome men. Tragedies pleased her when they had a great deal of love and a great deal of bloodshed; but Corneille's Romans appeared to her as brutal as improbable. Having learned to be silent, she kept her reflections to herself, without at any time dissimulating the pleasure she experienced in hearing any thing whatever, prose or verse, read by Raymond, who read with good taste. When women love something, search well, and you will find that under that something they love some one.

This rude winter was followed by a charming spring. To readings and sleighing excursions, succeeded long promenades. They marched away in the morning, and they went wherever they liked; at noon they halted to lunch in some arbor. Often they took along their own provisions, and dined in some grassy meadow where there was shade and running water. Raymond did not like elevated places which command a grand view and a vast horizon: he preferred the deep valleys at the foot of a hill which imprisons the glance. The hills have this one charm: they make you believe that here is the end of the world, that beyond there exists another very different from that we see, — a world where a divine harmony reigns; where all men are true, and all women faithful; where every question obtains its answer, and all devotion its recompense; where fortunes are assured, where happiness is eternal. Raymond sometimes forgot to contemplate the hill which hid the universe from him, to gaze at Meg, who was seated near him. Her face was a landscape which brightened every other, and which was animated by a perpetual play of lights and shadows. Now and then light, transparent clouds flitted over it, but through them broke ever the smile of a contented soul, to which the world was full of promise.

At the close of one of these rural repasts, Meg, after a prolonged silence, all at once took it into her head to say, —

"Monsieur Ferray, is not the country we see here beautiful as Arabia?"

At this word, "Arabia," Raymond gave a start. Mlle. Ferray glanced at him with anxious eyes, and then pulled at Meg's dress to warn her that she had just committed a serious imprudence. Meg did not heed the mute reprimand: she came and sat down by Raymond's side, and began to crack almonds with a stone.

While cracking almonds, she asked in a careless tone, "Monsieur Ferray, are these hills like those in the environs of Mecca?"

To Mlle. Ferray's great surprise, Raymond, his face betraying not the slightest emotion, began to describe Mecca to Miss Rovel; from the holy places he conducted her into the Yemen without seeming to remember that the country where the coffee-tree grows is also that where germinate deceiving dreams and flowering hopes which bear no fruits. With the design of better explaining to her his travels, taking her dress for a map of Arabia, he ran his finger without perceiving it over the folds of her sleeve; but Miss Rovel perceived it very well.

The next morning, upon awaking, Meg believed she saw in her looking-glass the irregularly pretty face of Mme. de P. She gazed at this phantom laughing, as one regards a conquered and humiliated rival. "You have set me at defiance," said she half-aloud; "but this man ought to be more difficult than that." Then she darted out of bed, and, dressing herself, gambolled up and down the chamber. It seemed to her that she had just gained a wager; that a battlefield had been won by her. Suddenly an idea occurred to her, and she discovered that she was not happy. It is in the character of women, especially if they are not yet seventeen, to push their victories to extremes; it sometimes happens that they have cause to repent.

When the breakfast-bell rang, Raymond and his sister, having gone down to the dining-room, did not find Meg, who ordinarily preceded them. They sent a servant to search her chamber; she was not there. Full of anxiety, they ran calling her in all directions. Meg did not reply. Thinking she had gone to sleep in the hay-loft, which she sometimes visited, Mlle. Ferray went to seek her there. Raymond crossed the orchard, and descended to the margin of the stream. A storm had swollen it: it rolled aloft its troubled, slimy waves. Arriving at a small inlet, where the water was deep enough for a grown person to lose footing, Raymond perceived Miss Rovel's broad-brimmed straw hat hanging over some reeds. A hollow cry escaped him; he plunged in precipitately, and with his two hands went to digging into the slime and rank grasses at the bottom. Regaining the surface to take breath, he heard a loud peal of laughter. He raised his eyes, and espied Meg perched amid the branches of an ash, where she had been entirely hidden from his view.

"What a diver and what a swimmer!" cried she, laughing, and thrusting forth her head.

Two seconds sufficed for Raymond to leave the brook, and for Meg to let herself down from the top of her tree. They found themselves face to face, and gazing into each other's eyes.

"I beg your pardon, monsieur," cried Meg, flushed with excitement. "I was curious to know what sort of a face you would put on if you believed me dead."

At these words, she made a movement to grasp his hand; but Raymond regarded her with an air so terrible, that she was frightened, and recoiled from him. He was furious, not for having taken a cold bath to no purpose, but on account of this impertinent fancy of Miss Rovel's, and her presumption in imagining she had such power over his heart. In this little girl, he came to recognize the woman, that is to say, the tyrant, the enemy; to feel himself again menaced with that mysterious, fatal, and insolent domination which he had abjured forever. His first and very senseless proceeding was to tear off a scion of the ash, strip it of its leaves, and raise the improvised switch aloft in the air. Ashamed of such a transport of passion, he at length forced a smile to his lips. "Miss Rovel," said he quite calmly, "little girls sometimes do monstrously foolish things, which deserve the rod; but favor must be shown them when they have the impertinence to wear long dresses."

With these words, he turned upon his heel. Meg had no strength to retain him, to follow him, or to answer him a single word. Immovable, petrified, she gazed after him with an air of consternation, just as Pérette gazed upon the remains of the pot of milk. The event had with unparalleled cruelty deceived Miss Rovel's expectations; and what had just passed little resembled the beautiful romantic scene she had plotted in all the candor of her soul. She had flattered herself that she should see a distracted man throwing himself at her feet, crying, "Ah! Miss Rovel, is it thus you sport with my heart! Do you not know that I adore you, and that I should be incapable of surviving you?"

The man had remained upright on his two feet, and had said to her with the tone of a schoolmaster, "Miss Rovel, you deserve the rod, but I consent to show you favor."

What a disappointment! What a mortification! Suddenly changed into defeat, her victory had fled in disorder.

Mme. de Sévigné said, that, when she had done a foolish thing, she sought no other excuse for it than that she had been drinking. Meg was not advised of this resource. She was beside herself with resentment. She decided that the outrage just inflicted upon her cried for vengeance, and that it should be avenged. She at first dreamed of drowning herself in earnest; but she made the very sensible reflection that this solution would be more disagreeable to herself than to M. Raymond Ferray, who would

acquit himself by bearing the cost of her interment. It was he she wished to drown, and this project was not easy of execution. She promised herself to pillage his espaliers, to destroy his greenhouses, to poison his wells, to set fire to his hay-mow, even though the conflagration should reach the house, and this odious man perish in the flames.

With rage at her heart, she slowly passed up the orchard. Suddenly she heard upon the road the rolling of a carriage which stopped before the gate. She was greatly astonished when she saw Pamela descend from it very modestly clad. The negress advanced toward her with a measured step, her head aloft, as belonged to innocence maliciously persecuted, and demanding justice from calumny.

"Is that *you*, Pamela?" cried Meg. "Where can you have come from?"

"From Lucerne," replied she, — "from madame your mother."

Pamela did not lie at all. After having been chased from The Hermitage, not knowing what to do with herself, and a little undeceived in regard to the marquis, she had concluded that the best thing remaining for her to do was to set out in pursuit of Lady Rovel. She had a quick scent, and chance had favored her; so she had at last overtaken my lady at Lucerne. Lady Rovel had just returned from a six-months' sojourn in a small German capital, where she had gone in the suite of a charming man, a petty prince, whom two thousand well-disciplined men obeyed from a secular custom, and who, after pleasing her infinitely at first, had at length, for the sake of the proprieties, begun to neglect her somewhat, and in consequence had become supremely displeasing to her.

To console herself for this new disappointment, she had resolved to pass the summer at Lake Quatre-Cantons, in a villa, simple, and at the same time very luxurious. She was supposed to be seeking here solitude and tranquillity; but the solitude was ere long to become very populous, and the tranquillity much agitated. Meeting Pamela at Lucerne, the lady had very clearly remembered having left her daughter at Geneva among people whose name she had forgotten. As the negress approached her with some embarrassment, she at once concluded that her daughter was dead, this idea causing her a most dolorous shock. As soon as she became mistress of her nerves, she learned from Pamela that Miss Meg was still living, but that she was exceedingly unhappy at The Hermitage, where they treated her very badly; that her faithful waiting-maid, having dared reproach Monsieur Ferray for his cruelty, had been pitilessly sent away.

Lady Rovel readily believed all these

reports, indifference being easy to persuade; but Lady Rovel's indifference was of a very passionate kind. She declared that she could not live without her daughter, that she must immediately gain possession of her, that she should go at once to seek her. As she was stepping into the carriage, they informed her that the weather was propitious for an excursion upon the lake. To conciliate all, she had despatched the negress with express orders to bring Meg within four and twenty hours.

"Wherever you go," cried Meg, clinging to Pamela's robe, "were it to the Devil, were it to the Marquis de Boisgenêt, I entreat you to take me with you. If I remain here three hours longer, I shall commit some crime."

"Are you *ennuyé*d so much?"

"To death."

"Our wishes agree, mademoiselle. Lady Rovel sends me for you. I have given her to understand that you would end by growing coarse and ill-mannered among these petty *bourgeoises*."

"Marchioness de Boisgenêt, it is God who has sent you!" said Meg embracing her.

Meantime, Raymond, after having changed his clothes, related to his sister the beautiful device of Miss Rovel, and the plunge he had made in the brook. According to her custom, Mlle. Ferray entered into his resentment, confessed that this little girl had unpardonable whims, adding that at the same time one ought to pardon them, because, in spite of her want of discretion, she had a great deal of heart. This was the moment Meg chose for entering the parlor like a gust of wind. Her face beaming with joy, she exclaimed, "What a happiness, monsieur! What a stroke of good fortune, mademoiselle! Mamma wishes to see me again, and before sunset I shall have left this dismal house forever." Having said this, she ran to her chamber, where by one turn of her hand she emptied the drawers, and then threw all her clothes pell-mell into her trunks.

Raymond darted a smile at his sister, "This will teach you, my dear," said he, "to be your own surety for a heart which does not exist."

Whether the heart existed, or not, it was with profound sorrow that Mlle. Ferray learned the contents of the letter Pamela handed her. This letter was short. One line had sufficed Lady Rovel to thank Mons. and Mlle. Ferray for the kind care they had given her daughter for nearly a year. A second line implored them to send back to her immediately this adored daughter who was necessary to her happiness. Here there yawned a parenthesis, which very near-

ly signified, "How much do I owe you?"

"Declare on our part to your mistress," said Raymond after having in his turn read the letter, "declare to her that we shall be forever obliged to her, if to the day of our death we never hear mention made of her, of her charming daughter, nor of any thing which concerns the one or the other."

In less than an hour, Meg had packed and locked her trunks. While they were being strapped behind the carriage, she came, humming a song, down to the terrace where Raymond was smoking his cigar. Halting some steps from him, and throwing to the north and the south her by no means tender glances, she cried, "Adieu, house, where, as the wise Pamela affirms, the mind and heart grow coarse! Adieu, Homer, astronomy, and all the great men of Plutarch! Adieu, hay-loft, which I had sworn to burn! Adieu, brook, whose craw-fishes were so dear to me that I wished to give them a man to eat! Adieu, temple of science and of *ennui*, where one cannot take a step, nor laugh, nor sing, nor open one's mouth, nor move one's eyelashes, without running the risk of receiving a flogging!"

As she ended her tirade, she perceived Mlle. Ferray, who, standing erect upon the threshold of the house, fixed upon her, eyes full of tears and reproaches. She was moved. She darted toward the good lady, seized her by the waist, and kissed her forehead, murmuring in her ear, "I love you very much, Miss Agatha; but you see there are things you cannot comprehend, and which, besides, I cannot explain to you." Then turning toward Raymond she said, "Monsieur, your humble servant." An instant after, she stepped into the carriage, and they drove away.

"Why are you so sad, my good Agatha?" said Raymond to his sister. "You ought to thank the kind Providence that has relieved us of a precious embarrassment."

In spite of all her brother could say to her, Mlle. Ferray was the most afflicted person in the world. As soon as she was alone, she burst into tears. Notwithstanding all, she tenderly loved Miss Rovel, and one cannot remake one's heart. She asked herself with terror what was to become of this child of whom she had fondly hoped to make a noble and virtuous woman. She wept Meg: she also wept a chimera she had been pleased to cradle in her heart. For some time she had more than ever caressed the sweet thought that Miss Rovel had been sent them from heaven to divert her brother from his sombre misanthropy, perhaps to cure him entirely. As her imagination travelled very quickly

and very far, she had begun to dream that under favorable conditions, circumstances and the gods aiding, it might be brought about, it might happen perhaps, that Meg and Raymond — Alas! Meg had gone, nothing more could happen. She remained for a long time before her window, contemplating with humid eyes the prints left in the dust by the wheels of the carriage that had just borne away Meg and the most beautiful of her illusions. For the first time in her life, Mlle. Ferray was inclined to quarrel with Providence, — that dear Providence who had now made her a bankrupt.

While Mlle. Ferray abandoned herself to unavailing sorrow, Raymond retired to his study. As if nothing had happened, he went to a shelf of his library to take down the “*De Rerum Natura*.” The edition he preferred above all others, and which he was in the habit of using, was Havercamp’s *Lucretius, cum notis variarum*, a magnificent quarto volume magnificently bound. Scarce had he taken the precious volume in his hands, when he saw that it had been subjected to an inexpressible and irreparable insult. Here was a page indignantly torn, or clawed rather, as if by the talons of a hobgoblin; there was another page blotted with dabs of ink; here he found a leaf in tatters; further on, another torn out. Thirty were wanting in the middle of the volume, fifty at the end. It was a massacre!

Raymond thought he must be dreaming. He soon had ocular demonstration that this was no dream, but a frightful reality; for, upon raising his eyes to the ceiling to call the celestial powers to witness what had happened, he discovered over the pier-glass upon the mantle, a large inscription, written with a feverish hand. It was couched thus: “Mr. Raymond Ferray is a prodigious great book-worm: I hate him, and I shall be revenged on him.”

The inscription was in English; and, as Raymond knew English, he could not doubt that in good French the words meant this: “*M. Raymond Ferray est un prodigieux pédant; je le hais, et je me vengerai de lui.*”

V.

RAYMOND FERRAY had promised himself that at the end of three days he should have entirely forgotten the existence of Miss Rovel; but he discovered, that, despite his apparent indifference, he was in a rage, and that rage does not allow one to forget. It happened that he often brooded over the thought that for almost a year he had lodged under his roof a young girl, *bizarre* enough, who,

having taken it into her head to please him, had seemed to prefer to any other amusement the pleasure of walking and chatting with him. He remembered that he, too, had acquired a taste for these chats and these promenades, that this young girl had become the most agreeable of his habits. And when a habit has the long blonde hair, the blooming cheeks, the sparkling merriment of youth, it always costs a little to renounce it.

Finally, he remembered that this same blonde had had the audacity to try upon him a very impertinent experiment; that, furious at not having succeeded, she had departed hastily, with adieux little courteous, and after having massacred the most beautiful book in his library. He could not look upon what remained to him of his Havercamp’s *Lucretius*, Leyden, 1725, without indignation against the shameless hands that had attacked his treasure. This great crime was in his opinion the mark of a villanous soul; and, as usually our chagrins are linked one with the other, closely as the leaves of a well-woven chaplet, the Havercamp had made him think of Mme. de P. . . . He united in the same anathema all women, brunette or blonde, whether they were eighteen or thirty years old, as malevolent beings, whom a man with a heart should keep at a distance from his life and his thoughts. He would promise himself to dream no more of Miss Rovel, and he dreamed of her twenty times a day. In revenge, he would never speak of her, nor allow any one to mention her to him. Mlle. Ferray was obliged to obey this edict, and to keep all her regrets to herself.

Time did not diminish these regrets: every day she felt more and more the void Meg’s departure had left in her house. She execrated the dear ingrate, the heart that so easily severed its attachments; but there was tenderness in her maledictions. Nevertheless, as two entire months had rolled away, and Miss Rovel had not deigned to give her one sign of life, Mlle. Ferray’s good-sense obliged her to confess, that, if the girl had any heart, she had but very little.

We need despair of nothing. One day when Mlle. Ferray was embroidering in the parlor, face to face with her brother, who was absorbed in a treatise of Darwin’s she questioned him as to his reading; and he explained to her the doctrine of the celebrated English naturalist, concerning the faculty living beings possess of insensibly adapting themselves to the surroundings in which nature or circumstances have placed them. She had the habit of referring every thing to the immediate object of her thoughts, and so Darwin’s theory saddened her. She said to herself, that it was with souls as with

plants and animals,—that the air they breathe decides their destiny. And, if Providence had willed for Miss Rovel to grow up a virtuous woman, it would have left her at The Hermitage under the care of Mlle. Agatha Ferray. She was praying Heaven to graciously explain to her its mysterious designs, when her waiting-maid brought her a letter. Scarce had she glanced at it, when she flushed with emotion, and, slipping it into her pocket, she waited a moment when she might be alone, and read it. The letter was in these words:—

LUCERNE, Sept. 2.

DEAR MISS AGATHA,—I wrote you almost a month ago to declare to you with humility and contrition, that I was ashamed, extremely ashamed, of having been so unamiable, so ungracious, so ill-bred in leaving you. As I passed through the parlor to take my letter to the post, I found mamma there talking with a certain person. You have often repeated to me that young girls can gain as much instruction from conversation as from books. But mamma said to this certain person that life is short, and there is no time worse employed than the time we give to repentance. “I can very well believe that,” replied he, “there remains to us so little time for sinning.” Did he wish to say *pécher* or *pêcher*?* I do not really know, for he is very fond of fishing for trout in the lake; but it may also be that he is a great sinner. The fact is, my letter appeared silly to me. I tore it in pieces; and that very day I fished up a trout with this person. He is an insipid blonde: you know that is not my color.

I should never have written to you, dear Miss Agatha, if I had not discovered that I cannot get along without tidings of you. I want them to-morrow. I wish, Miss Agatha, I wish—I wish to learn that you are still living, and that you cannot console yourself for my absence. If you make me this declaration in pretty style, I will tell you, as a recompense, that at moments I regret having torn, blotted, lacerated a certain book which a certain were-wolf loves like the apple of his eye. What could you expect? Heaven knows I was in a rage; and, when one is in a rage, one tears, one blots, one lacerates. How he must detest me, this wolf-man! I would wager that he weeps night and day for his dearly-loved old book. See how good I am. What a sympathetic heart I have! I have implored mamma, who has long arms, to give orders to have another just such book hunted up for me; and you may well

* *Pécher* in French is to sin; *pêcher*, to fish; there being only a difference of accent between the two words.

believe that I shall not keep it for myself. One must know how to deny one's self for the sake of one's friends. What I do in this matter is to satisfy my conscience, although it does not trouble me much: it is a good girl, and we have rarely a high word with each other. And so you can without difficulty believe that conscience has not prevented my amusing myself royally at Lucerne. This pretty city has been invented for that. Mamma came here to seek solitude, and her *salon* is not empty. There is a constant throng of comers and goers, all well made, well cravated, well curled, scented with musk or benjamin; polite, gallant; deigning, the most of them, to pay some attention to Miss Rovel. They perceive that her eyes are not the eyes of the first person you meet, and not one of them has to this hour so much as thought of threatening her with the rod. I occupy myself with them on rainy days; the rest of the time I row, or I swim, two jolly fashions of passing one's time in this world. I believe, in truth, Miss Agatha, that the perfect happiness consists in being a fish. This is not Pamela's idea: she makes a laughing-stock of me; the poor girl has not yet entirely forgotten her marquis.

But do you know what is most beautiful of all I have seen at Lucerne? It is mamma. In seeing her again, I was transported, dazzled, and I could not cease gazing at her. What eyes! What shoulders! What arms! mine in comparison are real grasshopper's claws. Good heavens! how amusing it must be to be beautiful as this adorable mamma! If I adore her, she makes me a small return. She pretends that I was horribly *ennuyé*d at The Hermitage, that Monsieur Ferray could not endure me, that he subjected me to a thousand vexations, a thousand affronts. I am not so much cast down at this; for, to compensate me for all I must have suffered there, she has promised, that during the next three months she will refuse me nothing, and will scold me for nothing.

“If you wish to scold me, Miss Agatha, you have a free field; but do not abuse the permission. A pretty wry mouth may have its charm, but grumbling always makes the face ugly. Scold me then with grace and good humor. Especially do not go and tell that were-wolf what I have written to you; that villanous pedant will prevent you replying to me, and I wish to have news of you. As for news of him, give them to me, or do not give them; it is all the same. Miss Agatha, Miss Agatha, after mamma and the fishes, you are surely the one I love best in the world. Your MEG.

To this epistle, which she often re-perused, not without an occasional shake

of the head, Mlle. Ferray wrote a response full of affectionate reproaches, good advice, and wise counsel. A little after, she received a second letter.

LUCERNE, Sept. 23.

You are then in life, mademoiselle? I am delighted of it; but too many moral precepts, Miss Agatha, — rather too many moral precepts! At ten fathoms depth, I lost bottom, dabbled about, and came near being drowned. To punish you I wish to recount to you two little histories, which no doubt will scandalize you very much. I have always loved to scandalize you; when I used to speak to you of certain things or of certain persons, you had a fashion of sniffing your nose, which delighted me. Are you listening to me, mademoiselle?

Day before yesterday, we all embarked for Gersau. Young and old, men and women, there were fifty of us, or it may be a few less. It was a birthday party, the Duke de B. gave to mamma. Imagine the most beautiful weather in the world, a rippled lake which murmured very gently, a large gayly-decked bark, flags and streamers everywhere, the boatmen as gayly adorned as their masts, branches of flowers, a perfumed atmosphere, three harps, four violins, and two hautboys, a wondrous collation, white wines, red wines, pale wines, which foamed like my heart, Miss Agatha. — like my heart. With the wine, the flowers, the music, when we arrived I was a little flighty, and thought I saw the mountains dance.

We debarked, and the people hastened to gaze at us. A man very much out of breath pressed through the crowd to reach us. He was dressed in black, and wore a large hat with a turned-down brim. He was a Wesleyan missionary: that is the name they give this sort of animal. With a resolute air, he planted himself before mamma, and barred her passage. The party wished to disperse, but he made a sign for us to remain where we were. He hemmed once, twice, and began an harangue in which he treated of many things: of the brevity of life, of the vanity of pleasure, of good and bad examples, of the immortal soul, of effectual grace, of the last judgment, of hell and of heaven. I lost much of it, and of the best; have I not told you that my ideas were a little confused at this moment? In speaking, he kept his eyes lowered, half closed. Mamma gazed at him with the sweetest air, and the beauty of an angel, with a smile capable of turning the heads of all the missionaries in the world. The missionary saw fit to open his eyes, to raise them: he perceived that beauty, that smile; he lost the thread of his discourse, became embarrassed,

stammered, stopped short. Mamma continued to smile. "I thank you for your excellent intentions," she said, extending her hand to him; "but what would you have? We do not love a stupid life." Thereupon she invited him to dine. The poor man could not utter a word; he made a dive, and disappeared. Miss Agatha, your intentions are good as those of this Wesleyan; but do you understand me? We do not love a stupid life.

Another song. I went last night to my first ball, a grand subscription ball, in the elegant *salons* of the grand National Hotel. Mamma at first refused to take me there under the pretext that I am too young, that one ought not to dance so early. I replied to her, that in ten months and twenty days I should be eighteen years old, and that, moreover, she had solemnly promised to refuse me nothing. She had committed herself. To tell you what I felt upon entering that great hall lighted *a giorno* — It was quite another thing than the decorated bark. A sort of madness came over me. I gnawed furiously at the fingers of my gloves, and mamma gave me a side glance to advise me that this was not practised in the fashionable world. The ball opened: I grasped the arm of a pretty Russian prince, who is an accomplished waltzer, and took it upon himself to patronize my first attempts.

If you have never waltzed, Miss Agatha, you have never lived. Water your garden-borders, my good people, but do not speak of any thing, for you are ignorant of all. To whirl around, your head half lost, that is life; the rest is not worth the trouble of mentioning. It seemed to me that a whirlwind had just transported me to the tenth heaven. Suddenly I uttered a cry. It was stupid, I know; but, if I had not cried out, I should have fallen dead. My Russian prince stopped, looked anxious, inquired what was the matter. I could not answer him that I had cried out from excess of joy. I pretended to him that my foot had turned, that it was nothing, and we flew away again in the most beautiful manner imaginable.

Water your garden-borders, I tell you; but I would have you know, that everywhere but at The Hermitage they take Miss Rovel for somebody: that last night she created a sensation; that she was surrounded, admired, courted; that they disputed for a glance, and a little place in her note-book. Ah, Miss Agatha, celestial pity! I said many foolish things to my adorers, for I did not really know where I was, and I would say any thing that came into my head. But, whenever these gentlemen go to saying things to me I do not like, I gaze at them with wide-open, truthful eyes, and they stop short like the Wesleyan missionary.

I would have you learn as a guide for your future conduct, Miss Agatha, that there are men who must be kept back, and others whom it is well to encourage. This latter is especially true of German barons, when they are very blonde and very timid. There is one of them here, who has large dreamy eyes, and who never says any thing. They have nicknamed him the "Romance without Words." I sometimes meet him on the lake shore; he stops to salute me, and becomes scarlet as the cap of a cardinal. At last night's ball, after having devoured me with his eyes for half the evening, he took his courage in his two hands, and asked me to dance a polka with him. To content him, I broke my engagement with some one else. I was determined to make this romance speak. I was coquettish, provoking. My coiffure became loose: I stepped into a little cabinet to arrange it. While standing before a glass, I was slowly adjusting my hair; the romance every moment changed color, and at last, unable longer to be silent, he murmured very low in my ear, that he adored me. "Monsieur," replied I, "gentlemen say those things upon their knees." The simpleton took me at my word. I burst out laughing; mamma appeared, and, seeing a man on his knees before me, she flushed with anger. I reminded her that she had promised not to scold me; and again she had to submit.

Moral science, Miss Agatha, is beautiful, but it is confused, it is involved. Pleasure is far more clear, and I know a were-wolf who pretends that the most precious thing here below is a clear idea. When I amuse myself, there is no room for doubt; it is a self-evident fact. Tell me what you think of my recitals, and quarrel with me. Excepting pleasure, nothing is more amusing than a quarrel.

Miss Agatha, I declare to you, that, after mamma and the waltz, you are the object I love dearest in the world; decidedly, the fishes only come in for the last place.

Your MEG."

Mlle. Ferray more than once gave a little sniff of the nose in reading this second letter. She made the following response:

"What do I think of your recitals, my dear child? It seems to me, in the first place, that Wesleyan missionaries are less ridiculous than you say. The one of whom you tell me, whether his discourse was good or bad, must have made some effort of courage in order to speak to you. I always admire courage, and I never make sport of what I admire.

"It also seems to me that I do not quite understand what you mean by a stupid life. If to place duty before pleas-

ure is the part of a goose, I am with the geese, and shall be proud of admittance into the poultry-yard.

"It is my opinion, that, if perfect happiness consists in whirling around and losing one's head, it is best to go and seek it among whirligigs. You place your ideal higher, Miss Rovel, when you declare that the sovereign good is to be a fish. Trout, so far as is in their power, endeavor to preserve the head that Heaven has given them; and you may be sure that Heaven does not give us a head only that we may lose it.

"I fear you are not wrong in saying to your dancing-partners all that enters your mind. I read the other day, in a very well-written book, that nothing more cools the blood than the remembrance of a foolish thing one has said.

"I think, finally, that the foolish things we do are far more to be regretted than those we say. It is a very foolish thing to take pleasure in seeing a man upon his knees. It is certain, proven, patent to all, that you have beautiful eyes, Miss Rovel. Do you doubt it, that you keep trying to prove it?

"After having meditated upon your letter, I dreamed of a pretty bark rapidly descending a rushing stream. I was afraid: I dreaded the broad rivers, the shallow waters, the eddies, the breakers. I implored you to let your good sense come quickly, and take its seat at the helm. It is the pilot I would choose for you, letting it be well understood that good sense consists not in refusing permitted pleasures, but in knowing exactly of how much value is all the merchandise of this poor world; things and men, beasts and people.

"I will trouble you no further with long moral lectures. Nothing remains but to assure you that I love you with all the ardor of my heart. This house has an air of sorrow, of languor, of desolation; the flies even seem to be *ennuyéd*. My rosebushes, which you will admire no more, the trees of our orchard, the brook, all here regrets you. The Hermitage well remembers a young girl, who sometimes seems like a giddy-brain, but who still knows how to reason very justly when she wishes to give herself the trouble, and to resist her fantasies. My blonde darling, after my brother you are the one I love best. Alas! I have place in your heart only after the waltz; I scarce gain a step upon the fishes. One must be more than seventeen years old to divine the worth of a sincere friendship, even though it scolds a little; you will come to know it, my beautiful one. Meantime I kiss tenderly your blonde hair. You have a taste for wordless romances; this should encourage me to write to you. — Your old friend, who

limps more than ever, now that she has no longer the pleasure of seeing you."

It was almost six weeks before Mlle. Ferray again received news from Meg. This long silence disquieted her; she gave herself up to the most sombre imaginations, and set all at the worst. The bark had foundered, perhaps gone down. She wrote several times, but there was no response. Sorrow was consuming her; her brother perceived it, questioned her, and she told him of her apprehensions. He only laughed at them. "Good heavens!" said he, "what matters it, whether there is in the world one coquette more or less?" It mattered so much to Mlle. Ferray, that she entreated her brother to authorize her to depart at once for Lucerne. He refused in a tone that would suffer no reply. Finally she received the following letter:—

LUCERNE, NOV. 3.

I beg your pardon, mademoiselle, for having so long neglected writing to you. I have just returned from a long voyage. I have descended through a great black hole into a country that you do not know. One sees there a great many curious things, among others that famous boat of Charon which Monsieur Ferray described to me so naturally on a certain afternoon when the sky was overcast, and we were grafting an apple-tree together. While working at his tree, he deigned to ingraft into me a little knowledge, even me! How badly they took root, all these scions! It is because the gardener did not love me, for one grafts well the trees he loves. The apple-tree conducts itself better than I. From where I now am, I see him, and also how cloudy the sky was. At the other end of the orchard, a great raven was hopping through the newly-mown grass. I see him also.

But why am I writing of apple-trees? I tell you I have gazed upon Charon. He said to me that the list of his passengers was complete, that he had his instructions to return later. I re-ascended through the black hole, and behold me here! Hail, good people! Wipe your eye-glasses: it is I!

A truce to mythology, Miss Agatha! I am recovering from a confluent small-pox, a frightful thing; of all things the most frightful. They believed me lost; to quote the physicians, it is a miracle that I recovered. The first day, mamma wanted to write to you, to pray you to come and take care of me; I would not allow it. You are so foolish, you would have been capable of coming to me. The first of virtues, Miss Agatha, is prudence. Among all my dancers, there is not one who has even dared risk himself in the ante-chamber to inquire if I was yet alive.

They left their cards with the gatekeeper, at the end of the garden, and ran away themselves. For all the gold in the world, that turkey-hen of a Pamela would not have approached me. Poor mamma! How much sorrow I caused her! To Gersau, where she had fled, she made them send three times a day the bulletin of my health. She was in despair; so much the more so, as she was very badly lodged in a little chamber where she could not turn around, and whose windows opened upon a stable. I was very happy to know that she was beyond the reach of infection; if I had given her my malady, if her beauty had suffered from it, what would have become of me? Nothing would have remained to me but to kill myself. Miss Agatha, as sure as I exist, you would have come; you have all your life done such extravagant things for those you love.

One night, I believed that all was over with me; and, strange to say, this probability neither displeased nor alarmed me. I had in my head, in my heart as it were, a sweet dream: my little soul was gently detaching itself from the body. I literally felt it going, and I was willing to let it go. Life seemed to me an arduous, dreary road; I was leaving to go whither? I did not know, but surely to a place where there are no pebbles at all.

Ah, how convalescence made me suffer! When one has tasted death, one feels that living is a fatigue. This is very simply and very easily accounted for: little by little, we have accustomed ourselves to the thought of dying; let the habit once be broken, and life is a business to be taken up and learned anew.

It is so with every one, I think, mademoiselle; and how a confluent small-pox in a little time changes all our ideas! I have reversed my eye-glass. I look through the larger end, and my Lucerne pleasures appear to me of small account; my dancers and mamma's friends seem to me little puppets, ridiculous enough. But The Hermitage, on the contrary, appears a paradise to my gaze. I am tempted to believe that the stupid life I have so much execrated consists in not living there, that true happiness abides in that place, even though there one might be threatened with the rod, eve and morn.

I am pursued by a certain odor of dried hay, Miss Agatha. Send me a great box where you will have the kindness to place the most beautiful craw-fish of your brook, two pears such as melt in one's mouth, a pebble taken from the breach in that little wall I used to love so well to demolish, a tuft of wool from your tapestry-work, a book,—a book upon morals, three pieces of advice, four scoldings, a bit of dust you may gather up in the library of that were-wolf, just

enough for me to begrime my fingers with; and some blades of grass plucked at the root of that pear-tree we grafted so well, — he and I.

He will now feel called upon to be delighted, to laugh at me. Ah, Miss Agatha, your poor Meg — must I speak it out? the small-pox has disfigured her; she is exceedingly marked; there are cataracts upon the eyes to which The Hermitage seems so admirable; her hair is falling out. You would recognize her no more; she has become fearfully ugly. Mamma is dismayed or furious, just as you please; it almost seems as if she must beat me. What tranquillizes me a little, is that the doctors give me their most sacred word of honor that I can still appeal from this verdict, that all will in time arrange itself. I know a very wise person who pretends that all at last arranges itself. If she has fibbed about this, I shall go to Gersau to see the Wesleyan missionary; perhaps he is there yet: I shall force him to marry me, and we will depart together to convert the Ashantees.

Adieu, mademoiselle. We leave at an early day for Florence, where we are to pass the winter. If, at the moment of departure, my ugliness makes me very much ashamed, I shall pay them to put me in the dog-car. Recount my misfortune to that were-wolf; he will doubtless pity me, and pardon my crimes. *Apropos*, you will hand to him the accompanying package; it is all they have been able to find. I have massacred one volume: I return three almost as large; it seems to me that he owes me some recompense.

Very much moved at this letter, Mlle. Ferray ran to read it to her brother, and at the same time handed him the package. In default of a Havercamp's Lucretius, it contained the superb edition of Wakefield, London, printed by Hamilton in three quarto volumes, 1796. Raymond had more than once coveted this treasure, without the power of obtaining it; and assuredly he gained by the exchange. He was careful to express nothing of his satisfaction; and he was equally silent in regard to the pity which perhaps he felt for two beautiful eyes over which cataracts had come, for this touching misfortune of a flower suddenly surprised by frost. He replied coldly to his sister, that she was very inconsistent to deplore so deeply an accident which ought to set her mind at rest; decidedly women had a passion for afflicting themselves about all things; a hundred times she had disquieted herself on account of Miss Rovel's too great beauty, a hundred times she had foreseen that this beauty would be her ruin. She ought to be de-

lighted to know that Meg was safe; as for the rest, with her dowry, this ugly girl would always find a plenty to marry her, and would not be reduced to evangelizing the Ashantees.

Mlle. Ferray found these consolations very cruel. A Meg disfigured and without hair! She reproached Providence, with whom she had for some time had a coldness, for having committed a crime. Had the good God the right to allege to her, like a simple mortal, that the end justifies the means? Since he could do all, might he not have ordained that Meg should become perfectly wise while remaining perfectly beautiful? Mlle. Ferray implored anew the clemency of her brother, and permission to go and bear consolation to her dear convalescent. He again refused her.

She addressed long epistles to Miss Rovel, in which she relieved her heart. She received first from Lucerne, then from Florence, short answers in a constrained style, through which Mlle. Ferray discerned evidences of a bitter disquiet whose secret Meg had promised herself to keep. This sort of secrets is always badly kept; and Meg had for two months and a half dwelt in a charming palace, *lungo l'Arno*, when she wrote to Mlle. Ferray as follows:—

FLORENCE, Feb. 5.

Do not seek to restore hope to me, mademoiselle. The doctors are liars. I am ugly, and I shall remain ugly. It is in vain that I summon up all sorts of arguments. I cannot console myself for having been beautiful, and being so no more; for having been admired, and seeing myself condemned to be pitied. They are very good to me; they try to divert me, to deceive me, to give me change; but they sigh for me, and that is the worst of all. I would like to hide myself in a rat-hole, and to taste the happiness of not being seen. Mamma insists upon my appearing. She pretends that one becomes accustomed to all. Ah, mademoiselle, one does not become accustomed to being pitied. To have life end for you at seventeen and a half years!

This is nothing; the trouble is, that mamma, above all things, wishes me to marry. She proposes a ridiculous bridegroom to me, and is indignant because I do not accept him. She pretends, that, as I now am, I shall never find any thing better. I resist, I argue: she treats me as if I were a fool, she torments me, she persecutes me; and this renders me very unhappy.

My kingdom for a horse, Miss Agatha! Alas! where is my kingdom? I now possess only two sad eyes which reign over a devastated face, and vaguely re-

mind themselves of having seen me beautiful. You, too, have seen that beauty, and you know what it was worth. Is it necessary for me to tell you of what I have need? Of good counsel and a good advocate. Some one who has a little friendship for me must take it upon himself to make mamma hear to reason, and leave me in peace; for, as to yielding to her wishes, let us not speak of it! I would rather die.

All is hostile to me, mademoiselle: all turns against me. My brother William, who has always been a good brother, is on ill terms with mamma, and cannot render me the least service. Last spring he left Barbadoes to make his first tour of Europe. He came to visit us at Lucerne. In seeing me, all his old affection revived. He interrogated me, confessed me; he scolded me roundly for what he called my thoughtlessness and frivolity. I showed him your letters; he was charmed with them. Unhappily, after having treated me to a system of morals, he allowed himself to reproach mamma for the education she was giving me. She was angry, she showed him the door, and forbade his ever re-appearing in her presence.

On the eve of our departure for Florence, he returned, and paid me a secret visit; he saw my disaster, and I confided my troubles to him. He proposed to carry me away, to take me back to Barbadoes. I represented to him that I had conscientious scruples about leaving mamma against her will, or unknown to her. He approved of my scruples. "Then submit yourself," he said to me, "for I can do nothing for you. I shall make matters still worse for you by interfering." He added — Mademoiselle, shall I dare to repeat to you what he added? "I see in this world," said he, "only one man to whom you could apply. It is he who acted for a year as your guardian. He has a right to be heard in your behalf. If you have need of counsel or assistance, address yourself to him." — "That man!" replied I to him. "You do not know him. He has a severe disposition. I am afraid of him. He had for me, it is true, one glimmer of friendship; but it was quickly extinguished, and my conduct toward him has not been without reproach." William replied to me, that great souls do not feel little stings, and that they despise small resentments. He ended by saying to me with a somewhat cruel tenderness, "Ugly as you now are, Meg, who would not have pity on you? Who would have the heart to refuse you any thing?" Having thus spoken, he embraced me, and departed for England, which he will soon leave to return to the Antilles.

I am embarrassed, dear mademoiselle,

in having reported to you this interview, which has very often recurred to my mind. I seem to be an indiscreet girl, and the worst of all is, that I am so. It is certain that my guardian (for William is right, Monsieur Ferray is my guardian) is the only man who can have influence over mamma. She suddenly conceived a great esteem for him when she discovered in him that famous Raymond Ferray, who had been to Mecca. I have given myself the pleasure of relating to her that perilous adventure, just as he himself one day related it to me in a mild, summer atmosphere, opposite a low hill. In her present humor, a monsieur who has been to Mecca disguised as a dervish would make her pass through a needle's eye.

Dear mademoiselle, if Monsieur Ferray would have some pity on me, if he would be so indulgent as to come to see me in Florence, I could tell him many things which cannot be written; he could arrange a treaty between mamma and me; I should owe to him peace of mind, life almost. Would you dare impart to him my desire? Tell him that I have much changed, that I have become reasonable and sedate, that I blush at all my past follies, that I would listen to his advice as a ward should listen to the advice of a guardian she respects, and that he might count upon my eternal gratitude. Poor Meg! Hers is the virtue of the ugly. Your poor little

MEG.

Mlle. Ferray's heart beat very rapidly when she entered her brother's study to acquaint him with Meg's audacious request. Scarce did he allow her to finish. Repulsing her, he declared that he was not crack-brained; that, being in possession of all his reason, he did not care to run to Florence to console there a little girl whom the small-pox had marked; that this was no affair of his; that he was perfectly indifferent to Miss Rovel's gratitude or ingratitude; that, moreover, this young girl would do well to accept the husband they proposed for her, even though he were a clown, a cripple, or any poor creature mentally and physically. He assured his sister that this was the only advice he had to offer, and that she could send it to Miss Rovel for all he cared.

"You are really pitiless," returned Mlle. Ferray, "and this poor little girl is so unhappy."

"Good God!" cried Raymond, "if, with a stroke of some magic wand, I could restore Miss Rovel's beauty, I should hesitate about doing so. I infinitely regret that she has not been able to follow her vocation, which was to become a heartless coquette, and to imprison in her cage all the simpletons who would

allow themselves to be taken by her bird-lime. Heaven has seen fit, through a grievous infliction, to derange this beautiful destiny. I am sorry for her, but I know of no remedy."

He said no more, and here the interview ended. Some days later, Meg renewed her request in a more urgent tone; and Mlle. Ferray, at the risk of being eaten, ventured again into the cave of this Cyclops, hoping to move him. Now he was seriously angry; he thundered forth his resentment, calling heaven and Lucretius to witness that he had formed the fixed resolution to pass his days without again seeing Miss Rovel, or hearing her name mentioned.

Mlle. Ferray, greatly afflicted, wrote to Meg that she had been repulsed with loss; but she implored her to have a little patience, as she should be sure to return obstinately to the charge, and by a regular siege reduce the stronghold she had not been able to carry by assault. Four days later, M. Raymond Ferray, to his great surprise, received the following note:—

"How good you are, monsieur! I see that my brother said true, that they can refuse nothing to this ugly girl. The certainty that you have pardoned me for all, makes me almost forget my chagrin. Mlle. Ferray wrote me a little while ago, that one must be more than seventeen years old to appreciate the worth of a sincere and devoted friendship. I believe that a great illness matures one's mind more than ten years of life: I challenge any one to appreciate your kindness as much as I. You are the man whom I most respect; formerly this respect incommoded me, and my heart sought to shake off its burden: to-day, the man whom I honor most is the only one who inspires me with an absolute confidence; and I experience a delight I cannot express, in thinking that he is interested in me, that he consents to render me the essential service which I have the indiscretion to ask of him. I thank you with all my heart, monsieur, and I await you."

As may well be imagined, Raymond had a stormy interview with his sister, at which he demanded an explanation of this strange *billet-doux*. She justified herself as best she could without implicating Miss Rovel; alleged that she had entertained scruples about throwing this poor little girl into despair, that she had amused her with a vague promise, delayed in its fulfilment until the latter days of August; that Meg had a lively imagination, that she had understood her reply entirely wrong.

When two obstinate-headed women ally themselves against one poor man, his defeat is written in heaven. After hav-

ing sworn a hundred times that he hoped to be hung if he went to Florence, Raymond set out one morning, blustering about Meg, indignant at his sister, furious at his own weakness, and flattering himself that within four days he should be on his return to The Hermitage.

Superior minds are curious minds; and whoever is born curious, whether he will or no, finds some pleasure in running about the world. This world is an agreeable sojourn for him who promenades here as a simple traveller; it is full of things which wound the heart, it is rich in spectacles which amuse or rejoice the eyes. In urging Raymond to set out, Mlle. Ferray thought to render him a service; she was persuaded that this enforced journey would do him a great deal of good. There was impressed upon her mind a salutary idea, that, as soon as he had broken his vow of seclusion, his imaginations would take another course, and that he would be delivered from that dangerous charm solitude had thrown around him. She had for a long time cherished her own idea as to her brother's malady; she had made up her mind that he was suffering from a paralysis of the will, and that paralyzed wills are cured by provoking a crisis which constrains them to act. Mlle. Ferray believed in the omnipotent virtue of effort. It is, indeed, a remedy of more avail than many quack medicines.

Raymond had made an oath that from Geneva to Florence he would gaze at nothing; but, in spite of it, he could not forbear opening his eyes. He proposed to himself to hurry through Boulogne without stopping; and yet he halted there to pay a visit to the Saint-Cecilia de la Pinacothèque. No traveller meets Raphael without holding communion with him, and we do not with impunity hold communion with Raphael. The next day, Raymond left Boulogne by that admirable railway which ascends the Reno, and through tunnel after tunnel climbs the Apennines. It was in the latter half of February. Yesterday, in crossing Lombardy, our tourist had found the landscape white with snow; when he reached the southern slope of the Apennines, a warm breeze swept his forehead, and he could not help feeling some emotion as his rapid glance took in the steep declivities, covered with pines and olive-trees, which enclose Pistoja on all sides. The spring was here awaiting him to give him a welcome reception. His ill humor could not resist so many enchantments; he admitted, that, if it is the first duty of the sage to enclose and wall up his heart, he is allowed to let his eyes and his thoughts wander around him; and, if he is a fool to believe in happiness, he must be an imbecile not to believe in pleasure.

When he reached Florence, he was half reconciled to his journey and to Miss Rovel. From an interview that he had with himself, he concluded that Meg must have been very unhappy to seek the assistance of the man who had humiliated her, and that she must be well cured of all coquetry not to fear showing herself to him in the state to which her malady had reduced her. He formed the laudable project of dealing very courteously with her, of gazing kindly on her, of listening benevolently to her, and of counselling her as a friend. He promised himself to be cheaply rid of this little consultation, and that, before returning to Geneva, he would employ a day in seeing again the *chefs-d'œuvre* of Michael Angelo, and the frescos of Masaccio.

It was in this happy and charitable frame of mind that he made his *entrée* into Florence. Scarce had he set foot upon the quay of the dock, when a negress of his acquaintance, very much overdressed, came to meet him, and said to him, "Ah, how delighted Miss Rovel will be! She had guessed that you would arrive to-day. She is below in her carriage. I will run to inform her."

Raymond was bewildered at the thought that Meg was there, that he was going to see her again without having had time to recover breath. He feared lest he should not be able sufficiently to dissimulate the impression he should feel in finding her so changed, that he might not succeed in concealing the first horrified glance. Just as he was passing into the baggage hall to look after his trunk, a little hand pressed his very hard, and a voice whose ringing tone was softened, said almost in his ear, "Ah, monsieur, my guardian, how kind it is in you to be a man of your word!"

He started, and quickly turned his head toward the person who addressed him. She wore a fur cap, and a dress of a deep blue color; but he could not see her face, which was hidden by a veil of very thick grenadine. Still holding him by the hand, she led him into a corner of the hall, and there, planting herself before him, she suddenly lifted her veil. For a long time he gazed at her with a disconcerted air. If she had had the small-pox, there was little appearance of it; she had preserved all her hair, both her eyes, the delicacy and velvety smoothness of her complexion. She was greatly changed. As she had said in one of her letters, an illness takes the place of years in maturing that it does not destroy. Her features were formed, her figure had gained in height; her glance was less animated, but it had more depth. The bud had opened, and the flower appeared to Raymond in all the splendor of its beauty.

He disengaged his hand, his face grew sombre, and he exclaimed in an exasper-

ated tone, "Miss Rovel, I have no taste for mystifications."

"Ah, well," said she, laughing, "you are in a rage because I am not as ugly as I boasted myself to be. With your kind permission, I will accept this towering passion as a compliment, and it will be the first you have ever paid me."

"I am not in the humor to pay you compliments," said he dryly. "I allow no one to make sport of me, and I shall take the return train immediately."

"You will do no such thing," answered Miss Rovel. "That would be the proceeding of a villanous man. Am I, then, so criminal? I tried to excite your compassion as the only way of inducing you to come; and I counted very much upon seeing you."

"Is it a wager that you had sworn to win?" asked he. "Miss Rovel, do me the favor to explain to me at once, how much there is of truth and how much of falsehood in all you have written to my sister."

"Upon my honor, monsieur, it is false that the small-pox has permanently disfigured me; but it is very true that it for a time made sad havoc with my good looks. It is also true, that I have been very ill of the disease, and thought I should die; that this little unfortunate accident awoke within me many grave reflections; that you will make discoveries in my character which will charm you. It is false that I am very unhappy, this is not within my power; but it is true that I am tormented by scruples of conscience, by uncertainties from which I wish to be relieved at any price. It is not true that I have need of consolation; I shall always know how to console myself; but it is true that I am in great need of counsel, and that I wish to ask it of you."

"Finally, it is true, — of all truths there is none truer, — that nothing is more charming than the hills around Florence, that you are going to walk over them this afternoon, that at the summit of Mount Oliveto you will find a little chapel from which there is a very pretty outlook, that it is a very solitary place, that you will be careful to stop there, that toward three o'clock I will come to join you, and that we shall talk there without fear of intrusion. Oh, do not say No, my dear guardian! it is my last fantasy, the very last of them all. Meantime Pamela is going to conduct you to the hotel where I have secured apartments for you. You will be very pleasantly situated there. From your window you will see the Arno, and the citron-colored sunsets which you must tell me all about, — citron-color, I tell you, that alone repays you for your journey."

And at these words, waving him an adieu, she flew away without waiting his reply.

VI.

MEG had carefully chosen the apartments destined for her guardian. They were in a hotel situated upon the quay in the vicinity of the *palazzo* occupied by Lady Rovel. The windows opened to the south, the balcony looked upon the Arno and the hills which environ it in a verdant, undulating girdle. Agreeable as were his lodgings, Raymond installed himself there without pleasure. He was in no disposition to admire any thing. He could not forgive himself for being caught like a simpleton in the net that had been set for his pity; he was struck with the change that had taken place in Meg, and which responded so little to the idea he had formed of her; he was greatly troubled at the vivid impression this change had made upon him, deeply chagrined at not having better known how to conceal it, and very much embarrassed at the rôle of guardian into which he had allowed himself to be enticed, and which he was loth to assume seriously.

Smarting from resentment, and harassed by a vague anxiety, he felt almost inclined to return at once to Geneva. And yet, when he had taken time to collect his thoughts, he decided, that, now the wine was drawn, he should have to drink it. His apprehensions began to appear to him idle and without foundation; he crossed the Arno, passed through the Porta Romana, and, turning to the right, he followed a straight, ascending path, bordered by high walls.

Three hours had struck when he reached the summit of Mount Oliveto, and the little chapel where Meg had appointed their rendezvous. He lighted a cigar, and seated himself near a blooming hedge whence came a perfume of violets. Opposite him stretched an orchard of olive-trees, carpeted with fresh green grass, sown with wild jonquils and anemones. Beyond, he caught a glimpse of the smiling region through which the Arno flows.

He had been for ten minutes at his post, contemplating by turns the olives, the undulations of the landscape crowned with churches, villas, and convents, the ashen-gray Apennines, and the great white, rose-tinted clouds, when a remarkably handsome young gentleman appeared, mounted on a remarkably handsome horse. He was a lusty fellow, tall and well made, with a rakish figure, a haughty face, and a nose in the air; he wore a fine mustache, upturned at the corners; there was a look of mad daring in his eye, and I know not what mad project in his head.

Having thrown a glance at the hedge, he frowned slightly; he had reckoned without his host, and Raymond had not

entered into his calculations. Not allowing himself to assume an offensive attitude toward the unwelcome stranger, he saluted him courteously, and begged the favor of a light from his cigar. Raymond rose, and presented his cigar; the handsome young man lighted his, thanked him, and bowed anew. He manifested some displeasure in seeing Raymond sit down again.

"You are a foreigner?" asked he with an air of courteous command.

"Yes, monsieur."

"Have you been a long time in Florence?"

"Since this morning."

"Is this your first visit here?"

"It is my second, and I have not yet made the acquaintance of Mount Oliveto."

"It is a pretty place," replied the young gentleman; "but when you retrace your steps, upon turning to the left, you will find near here at Bello Sguardo, a point of view very much superior to this. Through a notch which Nature has formed between two hills, you will see all Florence, Fiesole, and its mountain. It is a prospect I cannot too highly recommend to you."

He descanted with so much warmth and energy upon this delightful prospect, that Raymond at last asked himself if the handsome cavalier did not propose to get rid of him. The idea also occurred to Raymond, that this young gentleman had seen Meg going toward the chapel, that he had got the start, and was awaiting her, and that he felt some exasperation in seeing the place occupied. Perhaps M. Ferray was not wrong in his conjecture. As he rose, he saw the young fellow's brow grow clear, while his glance encouraged the intruder to be going. Suddenly he exclaimed, "In truth, monsieur, you may vaunt yourself upon having such an opportunity. If you go to Bello Sguardo, you will meet upon the road the most beautiful object Florence possesses."

And with his forefinger he pointed to Miss Rovel, who, wearing a hazel-colored dress, and accompanied by her faithful Pamela, had just arrived at the summit of the hill in a cabriolet which she guided herself. She assured herself that Raymond was there. Seeing him engaged in conversation, she halted, and feigned to be examining the landscape, while she impatiently awaited the departure of the intruder.

"In fact, the person you admire is not bad," said Raymond to the young man, who was indignant at his coolness.

"Open your eyes wide as you pass near her," returned he, "and you will perhaps find something to add to your praise. For six months she has filled the city and its suburbs with her beauty.

Her black eyes have kindled more than one conflagration. We admire her, we adore her; but we do not dare express our sentiments to her too warmly."

"And why not?" asked Raymond.

"Because she is an English girl, and she will take it that we wish to marry her."

"Would that be so great a misfortune?"

"It is in the nature of man to love to preserve his property," replied the young gentleman in a sardonic tone, "and certain treasures are difficult to keep; they conspire with thieves. The person of whom we speak, they say, will bring her husband a dowry of three hundred thousand francs; many people are of the opinion that this would not compensate for three hundred thousand disquietudes."

"Is she, then, so disquieting?"

"Those who know her best aver that she has two souls, the one blonde as her hair, the other black as her eyes; and that as yet she belongs neither to God nor to the devil. I would wager willingly for the devil. Adieu, monsieur; look well at her; she is worth the trouble."

Raymond bowed, and directed his steps toward Miss Rovel, who, seeing him approach, cried out in a loud voice, "You are very welcome, my dear guardian; have I made you wait?"

As he heard these words, the young gentleman opened his eyes very wide, and bit his lips as if to punish them for their indiscretion. He immediately gave rein to his horse, and withdrew, asking himself how long Miss Rovel had possessed a guardian, and reproaching himself with having made a blunder. This frequently happened in his case; but he had a lively disposition, and did not long remain a prey to any chagrin he might at first feel on that account.

As soon as he was out of sight, Meg gave over the reins into Pamela's hands, and, leaping quickly to the ground, she ran to meet Raymond, who was advancing with rather a morose air.

"Ah, yes!" exclaimed she, throwing her arms aloft, "I see at the very first onset, that you are going to scold me. It is a destiny I shall not escape."

"No, Miss Rovel, I am not going to scold you at all," replied he: "I have sworn to scold you no more, and I do not like to waste my time. I only regret, that, if you were ill last autumn, you had not remained so a longer time."

"What inspires in you this charitable regret?"

"I would have you understand that a severe illness is a grand school of wisdom. I fear that the lesson has been too short, that the professor has released you too soon."

"In what respect then, I pray you, has my conduct been wanting in wisdom?"

"In this, Miss Rovel: that, instead of quietly awaiting me in your mother's parlor, which would have been the best place for our conversation, it has pleased you to make our rendezvous a hill, which is not as solitary as you imagine. Brilliant young cavaliers promenade here, who are very well acquainted with you, and leave this place convinced" —

"That they are about to discover a secret," interrupted she. "Is that my fault? Why has not my guardian, who possesses the wisdom of ten old men, white hair, a face suited to his office, and a figure which dispels evil suspicions? What would you have? We must be content with that we possess. Ah, what matter to us the reflections of all the young cavaliers in the world?"

"What is the name of this one, who really is very good-looking?"

"He is a Sicilian, Prince Natti, or the handsome Sylvio, as they call him in Florence; a superb fellow in face and figure, a little of a madcap, with a somewhat fiery brain. He is the most reckless gamester in Italy, and is almost always lucky, although at the baths of Lucca, the other night, he lost fifty thousand francs in two hours. Since this misfortune, he has been trying to persuade me that he thinks me a hundred times prettier than a roulette. But I don't believe a thing of it, and I care for him as much as this" — And, with a well-applied jerk of her thumb and forefinger, she sent whirling in the air a pretty beetle that had alighted on one of the flounces of her dress.

Then she added, "But we dawdle, my guardian, we trifle; and time is passing."

She took Raymond by the hand, and led him to one of the steps before the façade of the little chapel. Pointing out to him with her parasol the olive-orchard, and the grass sown with jonquils, she said, "It must be confessed that this is a suspicious place; it appears better adapted to saying foolish things, than to rendering an account to one's guardian."

"Who has demanded an account from you?" returned Raymond. "I beg you to remember that I have not."

"Oh! do not put on that disdainful air," she answered, making a wry face. "You pretend not to like me; but, if the truth were told, you feel a great interest in me, and you will be charmed to hear the story of my sorrows. Permit me to treat of them seriously."

"That depends upon them and upon you. And, in the first place, have you several of them?"

"Two: and that is enough to kill one woman."

"You will not die of them. What is the first?"

She lowered her head, and replied sadly, "The first is that mamma does not love me."

"Ah! that is very sad. Why, then, does your mother love you no longer?"

"It is a delicate matter to speak of," replied she crumpling between her fingers the lace of her flowing sleeve, "and I would dare make this confession to no one but you. This poor mamma has a strange heart. Last year, during my illness, she was in despair; she trembled for my face. She was soon re-assured, and testified her joy to me; but scarce were we in Florence when I perceived that she was not entirely content with being so content. I do not know what has happened to me; but as Pamela, who is a very understanding person, says, I am no longer *to be made*, I am *made*. Mamma is more beautiful than I: I take great pains to tell her so. The trouble is, that I am seventeen years and a half old, and have the beauty belonging to youth; there is no help for that. In short, when we drive on the Cascine, we are a great deal looked at, and I very well see that she asks herself whether it is she or I they are gazing at. In the evening, in her *salon*, the glances and the attentions divide; I entrap half of them; she considers this stolen property, and I swear to you that it comes to me without effort on my part. Whatever I do, she always finds something in it to reprove. If I adorn myself, I am a coquette; if I neglect myself, I have a presumptuous confidence in my charms; if I am serious, I have some adventure in my head; if I am pensive, I have applied myself to dreaming; if I laugh heartily, it is to show my fine teeth and to be insolent; and God knows that all my insolence consists in not having thought of this at all. She says such things only by fits; she is often silent and distant, and puts on icy airs that throw me into consternation; for I adore this dear, beautiful mamma, and, when she used to beat me, I adored her still."

"The result of all this is, that she is in haste to get rid of you by marrying you."

"You are perfectly right. That is my second trouble."

"Are you not yet reconciled to marriage?"

"To marriage perhaps, but not to the husband! I have in my head a certain young gentleman you can find neither in Florence nor anywhere else."

"An Amadis?"

"How do I know? The husband of whom I dream must be a very romantic man, but one who has no appearance of being so; he must be a sedate, sensible man, but still with a great many inclina-

tions to folly, so that, with his pretence of despising all follies, he would be capable of committing the greatest of all" —

"That of marrying you," interrupted Raymond, smiling.

"That matter is still a little involved," replied she, "and I have not yet very well untangled my knotted skein. Does he exist, this man? I read the other day, that the world is delightful, and that we discover there what we seek."

"And, while you are seeking, Lady Rovel has found?"

"Alas! with the pistol at my throat, she demands that I approve her choice."

He was silent for an instant: then he replied, "Whatever the books may say, we so rarely find what we seek, that we ought to try to love what we find."

"And so you propose for me to marry this monkey?"

"Why not? According to its pleasure, happiness assumes all sorts of visages."

"You are not difficult about the happiness of others. If I were to tell you the name of this handsome aspirant — I give you it from a hundred; I give you it from a thousand."

"Do I know him, then?"

"Assuredly; and you know just what he amounts to, and especially what he weighs; a little while ago you had the curiosity to try that experiment, and he appeared to you light as a feather. It is — do you leave off trying to guess? It is the Marquis de Boisgenêt."

"The Marquis de Boisgenêt?" cried Raymond drawing himself up to his full height.

"Your indignation enchants me," replied she. "I have reason to believe, that in reality you set a far higher price upon me than you are pleased to let people see."

"Let us speak seriously," resumed he. "This man, can he really have the effrontery" —

"It is not effrontery. He is inflammable and headstrong. My rigor has exasperated his tenderness, and, his wounded vanity entering into the game, he has sworn that he will overcome my resistance. He some time ago made mamma's acquaintance; he saw her last winter in Germany; he followed her to Lucerne. He experienced some embarrassment in seeing Miss Marvellous appear one day; but his confusions are brief. He laid siege to me, and so cajoled me by his grimaces of repentance and contrition, that he wrested from me the promise not to tell mamma that he had one evening invited me out to admire the moon. For some time there was nothing more, until at last, breaking out again in the most eloquent manner, he declared that he was madly in love with me, and also that his intentions were honorable; for one does not

sing the same air to Miss Marvellous and to Miss Rovel. Since then he has besieged me with insipidities, with madrigals, with supplications. He hopes that, weary of resistance, I shall end by saying Yes.

"Meantime, as he is a venomous creature, it has occurred to me that he has been saying to all the world, that Miss Rovel has only a pitiful dowry, and no expectations at all for the reason that her father intends to leave her nothing, and that her mother has fine teeth, and will make a clean dish of it before she dies. The first point is true; but he, better than any one else, knows that the second is false, that mamma is very rich, and that there is more method in her madness than people think. He declares that one must have rather confused brains to demand in marriage a giddy creature, who has all imaginable faults, and a fixed determination to lead a good deal of a dance to the man who marries her. In short, like the great king you quoted to me one day, he spits into the pot so as to disgust others."

"A nice little man!" said Raymond. "And how has he contrived to win your mother's consent?"

"In the first place, he possesses three or four millions, which enable him to live a life of ease, and Madame de Boisgenêt will be a very well-situated person. Secondly, — Ah, this is a delicate thing to say! he has the advantage of being old and ugly; and, if I marry him, it will be impossible to pretend that Miss Rovel has permitted herself to dispute, to forestall — Decidedly, I can find no words to express this; I will not try. Finally, he is, of all mortals, the most officious, the most serviceable, the most eager to assist. He is mamma's factotum; he runs around for her, does her errands, makes her purchases, goes to her glover's, to her florist's, sees to the washing of her parrot, — a delicate operation of which he acquits himself enchantingly, — and every day he takes Mirette, her little dog, out to walk, claiming no recompense but to kiss her pretty flat nose; for he has a weakness for flat noses. And then he understands business; he is a man of expedients, of resources. He has advised mamma as to certain advantageous investments; and last month, perceiving that she had two hundred thousand francs worth of lace of which she was very weary, he went in person to sell it in Paris, and brought her back more than a hundred thousand crowns. Confess that this is a precious man and a most desirable son-in-law."

"Unquestionably; and yet, if you should tell Lady Rovel of that affair between this precious man and your negress" —

"They both persist," interrupted Meg,

"that it was nothing at all. M. de Boisgenêt has sworn to me by all the superior gods, that, my jest having appeared to him as charming as cruel, he had feigned to enter into it; and that was all, absolutely all. Let those believe it who will; but I promised to keep the affair secret, and I would not wish to drive Pamela away."

"You do not know how to despise: that is the gravest of your faults," said Raymond with a touch of anger. "I believed that, at least, you had a will of your own. Does your mother intend to use constraint to make you marry M. de Boisgenêt?"

"Constraint! not precisely; but her entreaties very much resemble commands, and at times I fear lest I may yield to the temptation."

"That word delights me," cried he excitedly. "If you are tempted, Miss Rovel, marry this marquis and his four millions right away. I am charmed to have come to Geneva expressly to be the first to congratulate you."

"I adore you when you are angry," replied she; "your indifference is my only enemy. Ah! for shame! you do not know me; it is not the millions which tempt me; I shall never have that sort of devotion. What embarrasses me is, that it seems to me as if there were within me two souls" —

"The one blonde as your hair, the other black as your eyes. Prince Natti said that just now."

"It is true, whoever says it; and from this result great inward contentions. One of my souls would be delighted to live upon pure water and dry bread with its Amadis; but the other represents to me, that, if I have the misfortune to marry the man I love, I shall believe myself in duty bound to render him happy, to practise in a saintly way all the great and small virtues of marriage, to plunge myself up to the neck in duty" —

"In a word, to lead a stupid life," interrupted Raymond.

"While, if I were to marry a Marquis de Boisgenêt," pursued she, "I should believe myself pledged to nothing at all, only to amuse myself in avenging myself, and to avenge myself in amusing myself. I must confess that this would seem more lively."

"Marry him, marry him, I tell you!" replied he savagely. "You need not hesitate. The deuce take this stupid life!"

She inclined toward him, and regarded him with a reproachful air. "Ah, well, said she passionately, "never mind! Since it is so, since you basely abandon me to my evil thoughts, since you refuse to guard me from temptation, since, after

having taught me astronomy, Corneille, and the great men of Plutarch, you encourage me to give myself to the Devil under the guise of M. de Boisgenêt, — so be it! I will marry him, and *vive la gaieté française!*”

At these words, raising her parasol, she struck with it a blow so violent upon the stone step where they were seated, that the handle narrowly escaped being broken.

Raymond rose. “Calm yourself,” said he: “I will do what you wish.” And, as he offered his arm to conduct her to the carriage, he added, “Give me your orders: what can I do to serve you?”

Her eyes expressed gratitude, and she pressed the ends of his fingers. “The first thing necessary,” replied she, “is that you go and see mamma to-morrow, that you preach to her, that you reclaim her. Try at least to induce her to grant me some delay, and beg her to take time to change her mind. I should be the happiest girl in the world, if they would speak to me no more of M. de Boisgenêt. And then, if you would set the climax to your kind acts, you will aid me in discovering what I seek through all Florence, — a man who in a slight degree resembles the one I have in my head.”

He interrupted her by saying, “You demand too much of me; that surpasses my powers and my province; I cannot take it upon myself to hunt up that wise man who would be capable of committing the folly of marrying you; but I will speak to your mother. I only fear lest you slightly exaggerate the authority of my eloquence.”

“Need I repeat to you,” replied she, “that a man who has been to Mecca can obtain any thing he pleases from mamma?” Then she added, “*Apropos*, in a few days she is to give a grand dress costume and mask ball. She will certainly demand you to appear in the guise of a dervish.”

“Much obliged,” replied he. “She has neglected to teach her bear to dance; it is a little late to recommence his education: and by day after to-morrow I shall be on my way home.”

Meg sprang into her cabriolet, and took the reins from the hand of her negress: then, with a demoniac smile, she cried out, “Adieu, wisest, solemnest, most grumbling, most growling, most fault-finding, least obliging, and most charming of guardians!” And, brandishing her whip-lash in the air, she added, “Oh, I have no longer any fear; it is I who hold the reins!”

So saying, she bowed, and drove off at full speed. Raymond gazed after her for some moments. He thought, I know not why, of the female sentinel who had

made a prisoner. “Bring him in,” cried the corporal. “I cannot,” replied she: “he does not wish to leave me.” Raymond felt deeply the force of this comparison, and was promising himself that before two days his prisoner would have left him, when he saw arriving through a by-path a prancing cavalier; and Prince Natti, having taken off his hat, cried out to him in a gracious tone, yet with a slight touch of irony, “I often do foolish things, monsieur, but rarely two at a time, as happened to me just now. Please excuse me for having spoken lightly of your adorable ward, and for not having divined immediately that I was disturbing a *tête-à-tête*.”

Then he put spurs to his horse as if he wished to overtake the cabriolet. This was not at all his intention. He only desired to follow at a distance, and he took care not to lose sight of the equipage. He saw it arrive before the *Porta Romana*, stop there an instant as if for counsel, then, turning its back to Florence, resolutely enter the grand highway leading to the Chartreuse d’Ema, a fortified cloister which occupies the platform of a rocky mound, and commands a landscape somewhat austere in its beauty.

Prince Natti also rode toward the Chartreuse, and hastened on so as to keep in sight of the carriage in whose destination he was so greatly interested. At the end of half an hour it left the high road, turned to the right, and halted at the base of the acclivity leading to the convent. Meg alighted; and, leaving her equipage in charge of Pamela, she rapidly walked up the path, not without turning more than once to assure herself that she was watched by no indiscreet person. Pamela followed inquisitively with her eyes; then, nestling into a corner of the carriage, she closed her eyelids, and took advantage of the time either to sleep or to drowse softly, and dream at her ease of some other Marquis de Boisgenêt, more generous and more faithful than the one she had known.

She had been dreaming for some minutes, when she felt upon her lips a tickling which at once startled and awakened her. She smiled with an agreeable air, in finding herself opposite a young and lively cavalier, who had amused himself by caressing her with the end of his riding-whip.

“Amiable blackamoor,” said he, in French, “I had a grudge against your slumber, which closed from my view the most beautiful eyes that have ever illumined Africa.”

Pamela had drawn a double advantage from her adventure with M. de Boisgenêt; she had become a little more distrustful, and she had set herself to learn-

ing languages, because it is very convenient to be one's own interpreter. She shook her head, and replied with a modest smile, —

"Prince Natti will never make poor Pamela believe that it is in honor of her beautiful eyes he has for eight days obstinately persisted in following us in all our promenades."

"You are a girl full of good sense," replied the prince; "but I assure you, that, if I were not madly in love with your beautiful mistress, it is at your feet I should lay my heart."

And taking from his purse ten gold pieces, which he put half in his right hand, half in his left, he resumed, "Blackamoor, I have two little questions to ask you. If you consent to speak, and if you are veracious, my left hand shall take upon itself to recompense you for your first answer, and my right hand for the second."

Pamela made a sign of the head that indicated entire acquiescence in the proposed bargain, which was just to her taste.

"In the first place, do me the favor to tell me who is this *soi-disant* guardian with whom your mistress talked so long upon Mount Oliveto. I distrust that personage: he is a shop that bears a false sign."

"You deceive yourself," replied Pamela. "M. Ferray is a real guardian, a very crabbed, very brutal monsieur, at whose house my lady placed mademoiselle to board. She detests him, this guardian, and treats him like a contemptible pedant. She has made him come to Geneva so that he may dissuade my lady from marrying her to M. de Boisgenêt. He has obeyed with a very bad grace. He is an owl that she will send back to his cage as soon as she has no more need of his services."

"Your answer ravishes me; it is worth its weight in gold," cried the prince; "but now answer my second question. For what purpose do you come stealthily to the Chartreuse d'Ema?"

"I would like to find that out myself, but I know nothing about it."

"Can a girl so wide awake as you be ignorant of any thing?"

"Mademoiselle is distrustful: she tells me only what she pleases."

"Is this the first time you have come here?"

"The first."

"And under what pretext?"

"Under the pretext, that the prospect is beautiful, and that, after having disputed with her guardian, mademoiselle feels the need of taking a little air."

"Without reckoning, that, in the humor in which we now are, we have always adored the Carthusian friars. *Corpo di*

Bacco! I am going to assure myself what this means."

He had already his right foot in the stirrup, when the negress called out to him, "Here she is!" and she pointed to Meg, who had just re-appeared at the outer door of the cloister.

"She is alone: she is carrying off none of the Carthusian friars," said the prince: "now I shall be tranquil until to-morrow."

And throwing the ten pieces of money to Pamela, he added, "I must fly, charming brunette; be faithful to me, and, if I lose my suit with your mistress, it is you who shall console me."

Thereupon he put spurs to his horse; while the negress, charmed with this little conversation, occupied herself in concealing the money in her pocket, and at the same moment she enclosed in her heart a savory hope which was henceforth to nestle there eve and morn.

Night was falling when handsome Sylvio returned home. He dined alone, or rather with no other company than a photograph of Miss Meg, which he had obtained through the obliging intervention of Pamela. It had cost him one hundred crowns and some cajolery; for, to obtain the least favor from Pamela, liberality always had to be seasoned with a little sentiment. He gazed for a long time at this photograph; it said to him very nearly the same words that Florizel said to Perdita: "When you speak, my dear, I desire to hear you speak forever; if you happen to sing, I wish to see you go, come, do alms, pray, rule your house, and do every thing singing; if you begin to dance, I would gladly have you a wave of the sea, so that you might dance forever." Sylvio, the gamester, had never been in love, only by short attacks, by fits, or through a resolution to console himself for ill luck at play. This time he felt himself seriously ill; he probed his wound, and judged it deep.

Toward midnight he returned to his circle. He was tardy; his friends were awaiting him, and to relieve their anxiety, they drained forced beakers, discussing forced subjects, which were not those that interest metaphysicians. After having talked of the carnival, of horses, and actresses, they had come to learned dissertations upon Miss Rovel. They emulated each other in extolling her beauty; their admiration spoke a language where exactitude contended with enthusiasm, and which contained more magic than any poet's numbers. The youth of to-day have given the study of woman a place in the category of the exact sciences.

"She is charming," said an officer of cavalry who was devouring his mustache as he spoke; "but, although I would not

offend you, I must insist that her mother is more beautiful."

"Strange taste to prefer a setting moon to a rising sun," responded Duke Lisca.

"There is no moon which remains," replied the officer. "Lady Rovel has incomparable shoulders, and for me the shoulder is the woman."

"Just as in man it is the epaulet," returned Lisca.

"Let the classic beauties perish!" cried the American Hopkins. "Lady Rovel is an Olympian goddess, and her place is in a museum."

"What an insupportable creature she is!" said in his turn a young Florentine, the Marquis Silvani, who would have been very well had it not been for his hooked nose; "the disdainfulness of that woman is revolting. From the height of her glorious adventures, she regards us all as smoke. You will see her quit Florence without having had the least fantasy here."

"Are you astonished at this?" asked Hopkins. "Her love is the holy sacrament; she has found no person here who is in a state of grace."

"Great good would it do us!" returned Silvani. "This Juno walks upon the clouds; her kneeling lovers must with one hand hold a starry canopy over her head, and with the other brush the dust from the clouds. This certainly is not amusing."

"They are too sour, Silvani!" remarked sneeringly a French secretary of legation. "Confess that you have tried to nibble at these grapes."

"I do not deny that," replied he with some vexation. "From my first sigh, they have tried to make me understand that such treasures are beyond my reach. I have not taken offence at it; it is a method of teaching me that I am not a reigning prince; that is nothing to be ashamed of."

"Nonsense, my dear fellow! You have not learned to put a good face upon a bad game. You other Italians run after every handsome woman you meet; and, if she happens to be honest, we see you fall like poisoned flies."

"That is a little rough," replied Silvani. "What are you waiting for, if it is your pleasure to canonize this saint?"

"I hold to what I have said; it is not an easy matter for any man to install himself into Lady Rovel's good graces."

"I propose a toast to Miss Rovel," cried Hopkins. "That little girl resembles this keg of Cyprian wine which promises the most joyous intoxication to him who drinks it. She has only one fault: she is in no humor to let one drink."

"It is the Marquis de Boisgenêt who is going to bottle up this wine," said Silvani.

"Do not speak of that odious simpleton," responded Duke Lisca. "Gentlemen, shall you allow him to perpetrate this crime? Will there be no one to interfere with his designs?"

"You understand nothing at all about it, Lisca," exclaimed Hopkins. "The other day I saw a she-goat consumed by a desire to cross a brook, but the poor thing feared lest she might be drowned. She went bleating on in search of a ford. Do you understand this apologue? The ford is marriage, and it is the Marquis de Boisgenêt who will make the goat pass."

"All honor to Boisgenêt!" cried Silvani. "This calumniated dotard is a misunderstood philanthropist; he glows with love for his neighbor, and sacrifices himself for the general good. He takes it upon himself to teach Miss Rovel that she has a heart."

"*Timeo Danaos dona ferentes*," returned Duke Lisca. "We shall be forever lost to honor if we let this virgin fall into the clutches of that Minotaur."

"Why, then, do you not marry her yourself, — you who speak so finely?" asked Silvani.

"Impossible, my dear friend; I am dependent upon a great-aunt who would disinherit me if I were to give her a heretic for a niece."

"Well gentlemen," said Hopkins, "a certain individual of my acquaintance is capable of this beautiful act of self-devotion."

"Who is it? Name him!" was the cry from all sides.

"Not so fast, gentlemen. He is a superb fellow, but he has a fiery brain and a decided taste for master-strokes. He has let himself be caught, he is in love, he will marry. Hush! When we speak of the wolf" —

At this moment Prince Natti entered. A general clapping of hands followed. "Viva Sylvio! Bravo, Natti!" they cried with all their might. "The order of the Annonciade and the crown of Italy to Sylvio!"

The prince opposed a disdainful front to this uproar. He went and took his seat at the round table, pushing his neighbors so as to obtain more elbow-room; then, having extended his arms over the cover, he demanded in an icy tone, to what he owed the honor of this unexpected ovation. When he had been informed, he replied, "Good heavens, gentlemen! to tell the truth, I should be capable of marrying Miss Rovel!"

"Her mother will never give her to you, my fine bird," said Silvani.

"Why not?"

"Because you are handsome as an Apollo, and she has resolved to give her daughter's hand to a little baboon ugly and wrinkled as this Boisgenêt. That

terrible woman insists that her future son-in-law shall bear written upon his forehead in large capitals, the fact that his wife need have no cause to be jealous of her superior charms."

"You reason like Machiavelli," replied Sylvio; "but you forget that I am a man no wife could trifle with."

"And, if you marry," asked Hopkins, "may we know how you will manage your wife?"

"I shall take her to my estates in Sicily."

"To keep her there in a private prison?"

"You have said it, Yankee of my heart."

"But you will invite us to come and see you now and then?" cried Silvani, passing his hand over his hooked nose. "It is a fine hunting region, those estates of yours."

"Two days before my marriage," replied Sylvio, "I shall take care to quarrel with all my friends; and, much as you are to me, I shall forget you, even to the shape of your noses, although there are some among your number which would make the glory of a menagerie." Then, having thrown a provoking glance upon all around him, he added in a tone half serious, half ironical, "Let it suffice to say, that whoever permits himself to make remarks upon Miss Rovel, my intended wife, will have to settle with me."

This declaration threw a chill upon the company. Prince Natti passed for one of the first swordsmen in Italy; and he was known as a man who would fight it out for a No, or for a Yes. Meg was forgotten, and the cards were brought. The prince had prodigious luck to-night; and despite the proverb, when he returned to his lodgings at dawn, all augured well for his amorous projects.

VII.

THE first night which Raymond passed in Florence was very much agitated. He had a sort of nightmare. He dreamed that his only property consisted of an old oak clothes-press, and that he wished to sell it with all that it contained. But what it contained was Meg. Suddenly he discovered that Meg had multiplied herself; there were at least a dozen of her, all pretty as a dream, and resembling each other in all respects, save that some had blonde souls, and the others black souls. He mounted guard before his buffet; but, however great his vigilance might be, one of the prisoners always found means of escape. He had to run after the fugitive, and this was difficult enough.

A customer presented himself; uncer-

tain as to his choice, he passed in review the blondes and the brunettes, cast tender glances at them, took them by the chin. Raymond, in dealing with the scoundrel, grew dark and red with anger. Another amateur, less familiar, offered to buy the whole assortment in a lump. Raymond gave him the preference; then, by a caprice that he could not explain, he changed his mind, declared that he wished to sell only the eleven Megs, and to keep the twelfth with the clothes-press, seeing that his destiny was to possess eternally a clothes-press which enclosed a little girl. The buyer rebelled, they came to words, and to dispute is quite as fatiguing as to run. The bargain was not concluded when Raymond awoke very weary with having run, worried, and disputed so much.

As soon as he awoke to his senses, he bethought himself that his dream could not come true, as Meg had a long time ago left his buffet; but he became fully conscious, that there was in this part of the world a certain M. de Boisgenêt, who wished to marry her, that for such a man a pretension of this kind was absurd and revolting, and that he, Raymond, ought to know how to frustrate it. He was astonished at the warmth with which one so indifferent to Meg's fate as himself embraced this resolution. What mattered it to him, after all?

His toilet finished, he sat down near his window, and passed an hour in contemplating the hills he had gone over yesterday, and which, enveloped in a silvery gauze, detached themselves boldly from the towers, the steeples, the cupolas, and the flattened arches of Trinity Bridge. While his eyes peered into this luminous vapor, he felt ever growing within him a desire to foil M. de Boisgenêt. Is it not a diversion to a misanthrope to mortify a fool?

Yesterday he had learned from his ward, that Lady Rovel breakfasted early, and that she was always visible before noon. As soon as he had breakfasted, he started for her house. The valet de chambre announced his name in a voice so indistinct that it was not understood by Lady Rovel. She was half reclining upon a divan. Mirette, who had been sleeping at the lady's side, barked furiously at Raymond. The pug-dog's mistress silenced her with a menace of her fan, and, without change of position, she made a sign for the visitor to advance to her sofa. They passed some instants in gazing at each other. Raymond was astonished at finding Lady Rovel so like herself; by some favor of Heaven, this miraculous beauty, which had just doubled the cape of forty, was sheltered from the ravages of time. If my lady felt herself bound to use some

precautions, none perceived them; and, even when these should become perceptible, there would remain to her that which the years could not take away, — those superb outlines, that most beautiful figure in the world, that haughty, dominating glance, that lofty nonchalance, that grand sultana air.

But this sultana had all sultans in her train. The hero of her last adventure had been a petty German prince; but after following him to France and England, after passing a season in his capital, Lady Rovel had become disenchanted, and since then the whole universe had seemed to contain nothing worthy of her condescension. The new illusion ended, life had ever since appeared to her a cage against whose bars she beat in vain. And now the imprisoned lioness cast around her those melancholy eyes which had renounced their search for a lion.

The parlor was a little dark, and Lady Rovel did not at once recall Raymond's features. Suddenly her brow cleared, and, extending her hand, she exclaimed, "Ah! is it you, monsieur? Is it true that you have been to Mecca?"

"Yes, madame, and that I have returned."

"Safe and sound?"

"With a little *sang-froid*, one can always make his way."

"You were disguised as a dervish?"

"Yes, madame."

"And, if they had discovered you, they would have killed you?"

"Most certainly they would have poniarded me: the Mussulmans are not tender of dogs or Christians."

She drew herself up suddenly, and murmured between her teeth, "A great achievement, indeed! This man looks like a gentleman!" She spoke in English, which Raymond thus translated into French, for his particular instruction: "*C'est une belle prouesse en vérité, et cet homme a la tournure d'un gentil-homme.*" She added in French, "I wish you would relate to me your pilgrimage from beginning to end."

"Very willingly, madame," replied he; "but first allow me to acquit my conscience."

She frowned. "Oh! I know what it is. Meg has told me that she met you yesterday upon Mount Oliveto. She has told you her little stories: she has succeeded in prejudicing you against M. de Boisgenêt, and you rush to me with your spleen. This does not astonish me. You are the most contradictory man in the world, and I ought to have forbidden you to enter my doors; but I am indulgent to pilgrims."

"I am not at all exasperated," replied Raymond; "but I confess to you that a marriage so ill-assorted" —

"Is an absurd project which could have been born only in a disordered brain," interrupted she; "the marriage will take place: you may rely upon that."

"It will *not* take place, madame: you may be sure of that."

"You are right; it will not take place, because it has the same as taken place already. It is all arranged."

"I do not believe it; but, if arranged, it must be disarranged."

"What impertinence!" exclaimed Lady Rovel. "Have you sworn to put me in a passion? I do not allow any one to contradict me."

"Contradiction, madame, is a less evil than repentance."

"I never repent of any thing; but, come now, what has this poor marquis done to you?"

Raymond was proceeding to give full expression to his ideas as to the character of the marquis, but she cut him short, protesting that M. de Boisgenêt was an accomplished man, wonderfully youthful and well preserved for his years, very well informed, very witty, well versed in business and in the sale of laces; furthermore declaring that she should always be delighted to have at her disposal his obliging services, and his good counsels.

"For the sake of pleasing you, madame," replied Raymond, "I grant that the marquis will be the best of sons-in-law; the misfortune is that he cannot become your son-in-law without becoming at the same time the husband of your daughter, and that your daughter does not want him. This entirely changes the aspect of the question."

She gazed at him for an instant in silence: then, bursting into a shrill laugh, she cried, "Ah, monsieur, have you not yet discovered that I love only *myself*?"

Raymond remained as if stunned at this declaration of principles so little veiled. He bowed low. "Here is an avowal," said he, "which closes my mouth."

"And I—I wish you would speak," replied she, "so that I may have the pleasure of replying to you, and of proving to you that you have not common-sense."

"I will confess it, if you wish, this very instant. After all, let M. de Boisgenêt marry or not marry, it is just the same to me."

"And I do not wish it should be all the same to you," replied she, warming up. "What does that mean? Meg is not a stranger to you. She pretends that you consider yourself in some sort her guardian."

"Ah! with your permission, madame, as a free guardian."

"I do not love the indifferent," replied

she. "This discussion is on a subject the least wearisome in the world. I consent to impart to you my motives for hastening Meg's marriage. Meg is giddy and rattlebrained; she has a very compromising freedom of voice and manner; and, if I leave the rein loose upon her neck much longer, she will commit some freak which will render her unmarriageable. Her foolish brother, whom I will never see again so long as I live, came to Lucerne to tell me that I was rearing her badly, and, before returning to Barbadoes, this august monseigneur deigned to advise me from Liverpool, that he placed his sister's future upon my conscience. Ah, well! I do not wish to reply to him, and I believe I shall make him happy by marrying her to a man expert in many things, and who possesses some fortune."

Raymond was about to reply, when the door of the *salon* opened, and M. de Boisgenêt appeared. "You have arrived, then, marquis," cried Lady Rovel. "This is M. Raymond Ferray, who is in process of demonstrating to me that I shall be a fool to bestow Meg's hand upon you."

The marquis was as chagrined as astonished, to find Raymond installed in his place. He could scarce keep his countenance. Although he was only a little taller than a boot, this tiny man was a complicated enough machine. He was born prudent and passionate, two entirely opposite qualities. Very much attached to his interest, to his repose, to the preservation of his puny person, and like Panurge naturally fearing blows, he could not help having pregnable eyes and heart, a quick, boiling temper; and, when fire was set to this powder, the explosions of his tenderness or of his bile made his prudence leap into the air, and it did not always fall back upon its feet. In perceiving Raymond, he felt an old rancor awake in his heart, which had never found opportunity to avenge itself. Having thrown a lowering glance upon the intruder, he said to Lady Rovel, "I am sorry to have incurred the displeasure of Monsieur Ferray; the misfortune is that I do not know who Monsieur Ferray is."

"You are very ungrateful, monsieur," replied Raymond. "Have you, then, forgotten that I met you one day upon a highway? You were badly seated, and I obligingly aided you to descend from your horse."

"I remember that hour," replied he with a grimace. "Urgent business affairs obliged me to leave Geneva before having it in my power to repay your kindness. But you deceive yourself; I am not ungrateful, and I am here ready to pay my debt."

"It is too late," replied Raymond; "for

twenty-four hours I awaited your thanks. A re-warmed dish never amounts to any thing."

"Ah well! what signify these riddles?" asked Lady Rovel.

"M. de Boisgenêt will doubtless do himself the pleasure of explaining them to you," replied Raymond. "I will be silent, and let him speak."

"Marquis, explain yourself!" cried she; then, hastily interrupting herself, she cried, "Why have you put on your sky-blue cravat? You know I cannot endure it."

M. de Boisgenêt was too much excited to stop to plead the cause of his blue cravat. Rolling his formidable eyes, he cried, "Monsieur, if you should make up your mind to render me some new service of the same kind, I swear to you that the expression of my gratitude shall not be delayed."

"It is a test to which I am very glad to submit," returned Raymond; "and the new service which I would render you shall be to save you from the ridicule which will not fail to overwhelm you in marrying, against her will, a young girl who has good reasons for not loving you."

M. de Boisgenêt was just ready to fly into Raymond's face, but he bethought himself of a certain iron hand which had one day shaken him rudely enough. Turning to Lady Rovel, he asked, "How long is it, madame, since M. Ferray has had a voice in this matter? How long since you have allowed him to dispose of your daughter's hand at his pleasure?"

"Lady Rovel herself," replied Raymond, "wishes me to say to you that she is most grateful to you for the honor your suit does her daughter, but that she implores you to cease it from this day."

Lady Rovel started. "Oh! this passes beyond all bounds," she cried, glowing with indignation. "Monsieur Ferray, you strangely forget yourself, and I am not surprised at it, for, since the first moment I saw you, you have been my pet aversion. Did any one ever see such insolence? The idea of your taking such liberties in my affairs! By what right do you speak in the tone of a master? I shall very effectually teach you who rules here, and that Lady Rovel gives orders, but does not receive them."

This energetic apostrophe threw M. de Boisgenêt into transports. By turns, he darted triumphant glances at Raymond, and contemplated Lady Rovel with an air of profound gratitude. He supposed that she was about to turn this insolent fellow out of doors. Imagine his surprise, imagine his dismay, when, in the midst of her tirade, she interrupted herself by crying out, —

"Decidedly, marquis, your sky-blue

cravat is insupportable to me! Go, quickly as possible, and change it, and, while you are on your way, give Mirette an airing; it seems to me that you have been neglecting her of late." Then, turning to Raymond, she said, —

"Monsieur Ferray, conduct me out to make a tour of the garden, and you can tell me all about Mecca."

She took his arm, and they passed out into the garden, where they had a long *tête-à-tête*. Bound by his honor, and firmly resolved to win the game against M. de Boisgenêt, Raymond took some pains to conciliate the good graces of Lady Rovel. He replied eagerly to all her questions; he told her all about Mecca, and the dangers he had run. Although Lady Rovel remarked nothing of his motive, she listened with pleasure to this recital which opened before her new horizons. From time to time, she detached her eyes from her fan to cast upon the narrator a long, penetrating glance, which was to transpierce him through and through. Perhaps she was seeking the solution of a problem she had just set before herself; perhaps she was saying, "Is it certain that this man in no way resembles any thing I have seen until to-day?" Perhaps she was only glad to while away one hour of the *ennui* which consumed her. Very clever must he be who would have been able to read the secrets upon that marble visage!

Raymond was returning from Mecca to Djeddah, life and baggage safe, when Lady Rovel said to him, "*Apropos*, why are you so opposed to Meg's marrying M. de Boisgenêt? You have confessed that you are indifferent to the little one yourself."

"Assuredly, I have not a tender heart," replied Raymond. "I will confess to you that I should more easily resign myself to Miss Rovel's unhappiness, than to M. de Boisgenêt's happiness."

"You detest him?"

"Not as an individual, but as a species. One happy fool is enough to spoil the universe for me."

"That is well spoken!" said she; "I love people who have hatreds. Besides, I confess that the cravats of this man are odious; but, as for the rest, I persist in maintaining that he is an excellent match."

"On the contrary, he is detestable: you know it as well as I."

"What stubbornness!" said she, tapping her foot. "Has Meg another to propose to me? Has she made you her confidant? She must have some ridiculous love-affair in her head."

"She has none at all, madame," replied he quickly.

"Has she told you so?"

"In the gross."

"Make her reduce it to detail; these little girls always get caught at the details. Meg is a sly puss; you must cross-question her."

"I consent to that; but it is settled, that, from this moment, M. de Boisgenêt's suit is rejected, and he condemned to the costs of the trial."

"Not at all. Hear me well; one of three things must happen: Meg must marry him, or she must present me some other acceptable son-in-law, or I shall put her at a boarding-school. It is of no use to ask me to keep her much longer with me; she will not fail to abuse the liberty I allow her."

It seemed clear to Raymond that upon this last point Lady Rovel was determined. The reason she gave for not keeping her daughter near her was good, that which she did not give was better still. Meg had two unpardonable faults; she possessed a rather light head, and a beauty too much admired not to serve as the text for invidious comparisons.

"I should fear," replied Raymond, "that Miss Rovel would not prefer the galleys of a boarding-school; and, in any state of the case, it is plain that the master of the school would have trouble with her."

"You do not envy his lot? It is an employment which you would not sue for?"

"God forbid! I have served my time."

"The best thing," replied she, "will be for us to marry Meg, and let this be done once for all. Take the affair upon yourself."

"And you ratify my choice in advance?"

"Do not hold me liable for it, I implore; I distrust your idealities."

At this moment it was announced to Lady Rovel that visitors were awaiting her in the parlor. "Come and pass the evening in my barrack," she said to Raymond. "You can talk with that little girl, and perhaps you can extort from her her secret."

She nodded, and withdrew; but, half way to the house, she turned around and cried out, "Day after to-morrow I am to give a mask-ball, and I wish you to come."

"Ah, madame, what a cruel jest!" returned he. "I have never had any inclination for the dance."

"You are to have the inclination which pleases me; I want you to do just once what I wish, and I demand that you appear at my ball in the costume of a dervish. It is a whim I have. If you refuse me, before three days Meg shall be the Marquise de Boisgenêt."

"You shall be obeyed, madame," said he with a bow.

"I very well know that sooner or later

"I shall end by teaching you how to live!" she said. And with these words she turned from him.

Raymond had no sooner left Lady Rovel than he was astonished at himself for having made two promises which he was very much inclined not to keep. The one rather humiliated him, the other rendered him much perplexed. Hercules, spinning at the feet of Omphale, appeared to him a personage less absurd, less ridiculous, than the philosopher, Raymond Ferray, costuming himself and masking himself to satisfy the whimsical fancy of an *ennuyé* English woman. On the other hand, he had engaged to confess Meg, to discover her secret, if peradventure she should have one. Last night he had left her, convinced that she had a perfectly free heart. He suddenly took it upon himself to doubt this; and it caused him an uneasiness, an irritation, which he could not succeed in explaining to himself.

Upon re-entering his hotel, he had resolved to write an excuse to Lady Rovel, and to set out this very evening for Geneva. He began to pack his trunks; but the billet seemed to him difficult to write, and he considered that his abrupt departure would infinitely delight M. de Boisgenêt, who would perhaps imagine that it was from fear of him. With an air of melancholy he resigned himself to his fate. Having learned the address of a costumer, he passed five or six times before the shop-window without summoning resolution to enter. He found no dervish cap to his liking, and decided upon a Bedouin costume. There was none which quite pleased him; he surprised himself criticising with the vivacity of an archæologist. When one has an exact mind, he exercises it everywhere; perhaps, also, he judges that every thing which deserves to be made at all deserves to be made well. Growing excited, he took a pencil, made a drawing, gave in a magisterial tone his instructions to the costumer, who promised to faithfully execute them; then he returned to dine at his hotel; and towards ten o'clock, having put on a white cravat, and donned a dress-coat which for a long time had been reposing in its folds, he repaired to Lady Rovel's rout.

It is not difficult to find in Florence *salons* where people converse; among these, one is justly celebrated; there are other very agreeable ones, where, to use the expression of a diplomat, they "*de- Cameron*," that is, each in his turn tells a story, recites a poem, or sings a song.

In Lady Rovel's *salon*, the crowd of postulants disputed for two places: the one was of wholly fresh creation, and had

not yet been occupied; the other had already boasted numerous titularies, who had been for the most part brutally deposed, and for the hour the place remained vacant through the voluntary resignation of the last. The initiated alone had information as to the double games played upon these mosaic parquets, under these frescoed ceilings. All passed without noise, without *éclat*; the ambitious ones involved in underhand intrigues trod gingerly, and laid their trains clandestinely. No one dared employ iron and fire.

As is often the case with women who have been much talked about, Lady Rovel held respectability in the very highest esteem; she was exceedingly severe in the article of decorum, and with Argus eyes held a police guard over her public receptions. She tolerated neither an equivocal personage, nor an unbecoming familiarity; not a free proposal, nor a wanton gesture. Although she cared very little for public opinion, she exacted from all the highest regard for hers, and since her return from Germany she almost affected gravity.

She had also united to this, a fanaticism of quite another sort: she swore only by two or three masters, and despised ariettas. You heard at her house, beautiful chamber-music, to the great displeasure of the Florentines, who have little taste for austerity in this amusement. If any guest had allowed himself to whisper, or to balance his chair, during the execution of a quartet of Mendelssohn's or Schumann's, he would have been brought back to decorum by a sign from that imperial head, by one of those glances which devour their prey. In consequence of these very strict ideas, Lady Rovel's *salon* offered only moderate diversion to the young people, who, however, did not cease to seek ardently for entrance here, as youth hopes always. Some flattered themselves that they might re-animate some smouldering fire-brand under the ashes of a benumbed heart; others came on Meg's account. These latter were constrained to be very cautious in their demonstrations of ardor. Lady Rovel might have written over her doors, "There is here only one God, and, like the God of Israel, he is glorious and jealous."

The reception she gave Raymond was very remarkable; for a long time the goddess had not seemed so much humanized. As soon as she saw him enter, her brows divested themselves of their perpetual cloud, she shook off her languor. Having motioned him to approach, she conversed with him in so animated a tone, that M. de Boisgenêt expressed the most violent resentment. Every now and then she would throw her flaming eyes upon

Raymond, who remained insensible to her provocations. Happily for the marquis, Meg, after long delay, at last appeared in a robe of rose-colored silk, falling off from the neck and shoulders, the spring upon her cheeks, joy upon her forehead. Flaunting, frisking, strutting, her gait resembled the uncertain, tumultuous steps of a young priestess of Bacchus, who has still her rôle to learn. All eyes followed this apparition; she gazed at those who gazed at her, and seemed to say to them, "Ah, yes, I exist; and it is a stroke of good fortune which I shall learn to profit by."

M. de Boisgenêt, without losing a second, rushed up to Meg with the lordly authority of a proprietor who enters into possession, his authentic deed of purchase in his hand. He led her to a deserted corner of the *salon*, seated himself at her side, and disposed his chair in such a manner that no one could approach. After having overwhelmed her with compliments upon her beauty and her rose-colored dress, which so set off the lustre of her tawny blonde hair, he asked in a doleful tone how much longer she was going to amuse herself by making him suffer.

"I warn you," said he, "that I am the most obstinate of lovers. If you wish to get rid of me, have me poniarded at once by your guardian, whom, let me tell you by the way, I have proposed to fight, but the proposition does not seem agreeable to him. Be on your guard; since his arrival here, your mother treats me coldly; if the life of this man is dear to you, seek to cajole him, to prevail upon him to cease his opposition to my happiness. I do not conceal it from you, I am furious: I am burning to stanch my rage in the blood of ten professors of Arabic."

Meg listened to his grievances and reproaches with more gentleness than she was wont to show him. She told him that he did wrong to get discouraged, that the inclinations of young girls are changeable, that they must gradually become reconciled to certain ideas, that the mast should be given time to ferment; she assured him that a little fermentation was going on in her head with which he had no reason to be discontented; and she implored him to leave her guardian in peace; he was a pedant to be sure, but a very respectable pedant, and, as for the rest, this professor of Arabic was an adept in the use both of the sword and pistol. Thus she lavished upon the marquis, at the same time, consolations, hopes, and good advice.

The first half of her discourse charmed M. de Boisgenêt: the peroration rendered him pensive. He promised Meg, that, to oblige her, he would control the transports of his ungovernable fury, that there

should be no bloodshed but, in return, he conjured her to fix a term to his perplexities, to tell him truly, how many days she proposed to make him wait for her consent.

He was destined to gain no light upon this matter. Lady Rovel, who had seen with an evil eye the unbecoming haste with which he had rushed to meet Meg, despatched a servant to inform him that one of her symphonists had failed to keep his word, and that she desired the Marquis de Boisgenêt to go immediately in quest of a second violin; he should apply to the gendarmes, if necessary, and, in any event, bring the musician within an hour, dead or alive.

The marquis, thus called upon to be his own executioner, departed very reluctantly, even angrily. As soon as he had left, Prince Natti, who was roaming in this vicinity like a ravenous wolf prowling around a sheepfold, took possession of Meg's chair, and in his turn become her jailer.

"It seems to me, prince, that it is cloudy this evening," said she. "You have not a limpid forehead. What is the matter?"

"I have chagrins," returned Sylvio.

"Impart them to me. I am in a very good humor, I will console you. Have you lost at play?"

"No, I am jealous."

"Of M. de Boisgenêt: he is urgent, and I say to myself, that, all things considered, it is necessary to come to a decision."

"It is not that imbecile who makes me uneasy: I am jealous of a Carthusian cloister."

"Of all, from monsieur the prior, down to the lay-brothers and the porter? There is a jealousy which ought to give you full occupation."

"Did you return to-day to the Chartreuse d'Ema?" asked he, still pursuing the main subject of his anxiety.

"Why should I have gone there?"

"For the same reason that led you there yesterday."

"Must I tell you that reason?"

"Spare me, or I am a dead man."

"Die then, my handsome fellow. I went yesterday to the Chartreuse d'Ema, to perplex a certain spy, who for several days has employed his afternoons in dogging my footsteps."

"Is this really true?"

"I never tell wrong stories when I have on my rose-colored dress."

"In that case, it is joy to die, since I am in your eyes a man so important that you take pains to disquiet him."

"Have you been really disquieted?"

"What a question! You well know, that for a long time" —

"Hush!" said Meg, "I know what

you are going to say. You are about to tell me that you adore me. But that is nothing, unless you adore me enough to marry me."

"Do you demand that of me?"

"Mamma insists upon my marrying, and so must I," replied she with a burst of laughter.

"Alas! you well know that my mother will never consent."

"Are you still harping upon that old string? We can force people to wish what they do not wish."

"And so you give me *carte blanche*?"

"White as my hand."

"That says all that could be desired. Very well. I shall take measures that will compromise you horribly."

"What an idea! Will you climb up to me at night by a silken ladder?"

"I shall do better than that: I shall elope with you. After such an escapade, Lady Rovel will be obliged to enter into some arrangement, and my mother can be induced to yield."

"How you go on! But really an elopement would be very delightful, very amusing. Do elope with me!"

"I would give my life," resumed Sylvio, after a pause, "to know when you jest, and when you are in earnest."

"If I ever succeed in finding out myself, I shall be sure to inform you first of all; but we have talked too long. Ah, that guardian of mine, that terrible man! I pray you, yield your place to him. My nurse has always told me that it is one's duty to learn how to be *ennuyé*d with a good grace."

Prince Natti hastened to obey; but, before withdrawing, he gazed steadily into Meg's eyes, as if he flattered himself that he could see into their depths, and read what was written there; then he said to her, "I am serious in all I have just been saying to you. You will allow me in memory of this interview to speak to you again not later than day after to-morrow evening. Masks set the tongue at liberty."

"You forget that I also shall be masked. Shall you recognize me?"

"Your laugh will always betray you," replied he, — "your crystal laugh that throws me into despair, and which I adore."

Thus speaking, he withdrew, saluting Raymond as he passed along, with a courtesy which bordered on impertinence. Having gained the other extremity of the *salon*, he made his way to Lady Rovel, who showed him extreme coldness, scarce vouchsafing him three words.

Meantime, Meg had beckoned to Raymond to seat himself in the vacant chair.

"Ah! come here, my dear guardian," she said, "come shake hands with me. How I have longed to see you! But you

also have a sombre air. What new crime have I committed? The bear, so naturalists say, is very susceptible to anger, and his voice is one perpetual growl. Growl at me at once: it will relieve you."

"I shall take care not to growl at you," returned Raymond. "On the contrary, I must politely beg your pardon for having interrupted a conversation which appeared to amuse you so much."

"Do you suppose we said any thing improper, Prince Natti and I? It is not one of our habits."

"I have no idea what he could have said to you; but I remark with pleasure, that he has the gift of interesting you."

"'Bark with wolves, and talk nonsense with fools!' But, Plutarch aside, that is the true moral philosophy. I beg you to believe that what you are about to say to me interests me far more than the declarations of handsome Sylvio. You have seen mamma: has she listened to reason?"

"I have obtained from her little more than a commutation of your punishment. You will either marry M. de Boisgenêt, or you will be sent to a boarding-school."

"What a horrible sentence! Heaven pity me! This is heart-rending."

"Listen to every word I say, Miss Rovel! Your mother justly complains of the freedom of your manners. She has grievances on your account, which seem to me well founded. At the first new cause for displeasure you give her, she will confine you in some boarding-school."

"Has she said so?"

"Very plainly."

"What a lot is mine, my dear guardian! To be either the Marchioness de Boisgenêt or a boarding-school miss forever!"

"Yes, you must be one of these or the other, unless you can propose some match which will be agreeable to your mother."

"What would you say? I like that better. Ah, well! Have I not delegated to you the duty of getting me married? Cast your glances around you. Is there no person here who pleases you? What think you of Prince Natti?"

"He belongs to the race of debonair and clement bullies. His mustache says to the universe, 'See how good I am! I do not eat you!'"

"And yet, he has one merit, that of loving me; he keeps repeating it to me every hour."

"You know as well as I that basset is a very dangerous rival."

"And what do you think of Marquis Silvani, of that little monsieur who raises himself on tiptoe to be seen by mamma?"

"He is the last descendant of a degenerate race. There remains in him just enough vital heat to live, but not enough

to love. I do not know whether he has ever tried to take fire, but most surely he is extinguished."

"And Duke Lisca, what do you say of him?"

"That he is tall in stature, but low in appearance."

"And what of that American you see over there, abstractedly rolling a cigar between his fingers? He would see fine sport if he should so forget himself as to light it."

"I should say that he is very vulgar, but broad-shouldered and robust, and that he would allow his wife a great deal of liberty. This is perhaps the base of conjugal happiness."

"What a setting-out you give them all!" exclaimed Meg, "and how discouraging you are!"

"The whole world is not here," responded he. "Is there truly no one else?"

"No one," replied she in a hasty tone.

"Are you very sure?"

"As sure as it is possible to be."

"I very much regret, Miss Rovel," resumed Raymond with an amiable air, "that there is in Florence no young man of good appearance and good principles, who has succeeded in touching your heart. Perhaps I should have pleaded his cause so well, that your mother would have yielded."

She was silent for an instant, crumpling her fan between her fingers in an embarrassed way. Then she asked suddenly, "It is not a trap?"

"Am I a man to set traps?" asked he.

"Do you promise to keep my secret?"

"I promise you," said he with a slight tremor in his voice.

"Do you swear not to repeat what I am about to tell you, to mamma or any other person?"

"How many oaths must I make to you?" answered he in an impatient tone.

"Ah, well! I do not know whether I love him, but I know that he pleases me; when I see him, my heart beats with pleasure. I think of him often enough, twenty times a day, and two or three times during the night. Upon the whole, if it is not love, it is something very much like it."

Of what was Raymond dreaming? He perceived, a little too late, that he had scratched with his nails the pretty round table in Chinese lacque upon which he had placed his hand. "What is the name of this fortunate mortal?" asked he in an ironical tone.

She stammered with downcast eyes, "He calls himself Mr. Gordon."

"And who, I pray you, is this Mr. Gordon?" cried he, and in a new absence of mind, with his right hand he unbuttoned

his left-hand glove so hastily as to make a large rent.

Meg informed him that Mr. Gordon was a young Scotchman, who appeared well-born, modest, of excellent manners; that she had met him several times on the Cascino and elsewhere; that one evening, at the theatre, they had gazed a great deal at each other; that the next day they had had occasion to exchange a few words; that, two days later, he had addressed her an ardent, but respectful letter, to which she had not hesitated to reply; that since then, she had received three other letters written in the same style; that, in the last, he had implored her permission to present himself to Lady Rovel. She was beginning again to sound his praises, when Raymond interrupted her by demanding where this Mr. Gordon perched. She replied that the Chartrreuse d'Ema always had some vacant cells which were rented to strangers, and that Mr. Gordon had chosen a domicile at the convent. She ventured to confess to Raymond that yesterday she had gone there to seek Mr. Gordon, but with the most laudable intentions, and for the sole purpose of returning his letters to the young Scotchman, and imploring him to write her no more. "The poor fellow," continued she, "promised to obey me; but there were tears in his eyes and in his voice; his sorrow touched my heart. We agreed that in a few days from this I should send him through the post, either a jonquil or a basil; that the basil would say to him, 'It is useless; think no more of it!' and the jonquil, 'Hope on: we shall see!'"

Then she added, "I have vowed, monsieur, to govern myself according to your advice. Do me the favor to go to-morrow to the cloister; you can ask for Mr. Gordon, you can say to him that you are curious to look around the convent, and that I pray him to place himself at your disposal. Thus you will have opportunity to examine him at your ease, to make him talk. If he pleases you, I shall believe myself authorized to love him, and I will allow my heart to take its chosen course; if he displeases you, if you condemn him without appeal, you can place in his hands at leaving, a little *sachet* which I shall give you, and which contains some basil leaves. It is understood, is it not? You see that I place myself at your discretion; and I state it as a fact, that, since the world began, never was ward more submissive to her guardian."

"So be it!" replied he in a softened tone; "you make me yield to all you wish; but enough of this, Miss Rovel; it is time to break off a conversation which is beginning to attract remark."

They separated. Meg went to join a

group; Raymond remained apart, his back resting against a pilaster. M. de Boisgenêt had succeeded in forcing out, and bringing under the protection of a police-guard, a second violin. The concert began. Miss Rovel's guardian was in musical matters of the opinion of the Florentines; he little appreciated diversissements and semiquavers, which give one the headache. But, even if they had played Beethoven or Mozart, he would have listened only with one ear; he was dreaming of the visit he was to make to-morrow to a Carthusian cloister. As soon as possible, he went to pay his adieux to Lady Rovel, who asked if Meg had made him any revelation.

"Madame," said he, "I fear that I do not possess her confidence; but it seems more probable to me, that she has little to confide."

The next day, after breakfast, Raymond set out for the Carthusian cloister. He was armed with the two little sachets Meg had sent him this morning, one of which contained a withered jonquil, the other a sprig of basil. While trudging on his way, the thought occurred to him, that the commission he had to fulfil was either delicate or puerile, and that he had done wrong to assume it. He promised himself to decide nothing, to leave things as they were, to take back both the basil and the jonquil; and he began to recite, with some slight emphasis, the words of the good Palemon:—

Non nostrum inter vos tantas componere lites.

Virgil made him think of Lucretius. He called to mind some lines of the *De Rerum Natura*, which he had recently translated, and whose sense is very nearly as follows: "Thou hast open eyes, thou believest that thou livest, and yet thy life is already dead. Thou sleepest while awake, thy imaginations are dreams, thy hopes are phantoms. If thou art not ignorant of the cause of thy malady, thou wilt learn to know nature and her laws; and from that day thou wilt taste the eternal repose which that nothingness promises thee, where man dreams no more."

He had just recalled the last of these lines, when, arrived in sight of the convent, he perceived, on the declivity of a hill, flowering almond-trees, which wove a white woof before those rocks scorched and blackened by the sun. In contemplating these almond-trees, whose beauty adorned the approaches of a Thebaid, it appeared to him, that, in spite of Lucretius, there was in this world something else than nothingness; that, if it is absurd to dream, spring gives reason to this folly; and that nature keeps alive in deaf intelligences some unknown principle, which persists in hoping still.

He had not yet solved this contradiction, when he reached the entrance of the cloister, which one might easily take for the access to a fortified castle; and it is in fact a real fortress, this holy house encamped upon a rock, whose approaches resemble bastions united by a curtain. As everywhere in Florence, the graceful blends with the severe: each cell has leading from it a bit of garden, where flourishes an orange-tree.

Raymond inquired for Mr. Gordon of a lay-brother, who hastened to conduct him into that part of the monastery reserved for strangers. A door opened, and he found himself in the presence of a young fellow of twenty-four years or more, a very pretty lad, slender, tall in stature, his chin shaded by a light blonde beard, which only heightened the effect of the clear, rosy complexion. His very youthful air astonished Raymond: he had represented to himself this Scotchman as entirely different, and could not at all imagine that he had just left the university, that he still bore upon his lips the milk of Oxford or of Cambridge.

"Ah well!" thought he at first sight, "that is a doll whose head Miss Rovel would soon get broken." He entered into conversation, stated his name and his titles, explained that Miss Rovel did him the favor to consider him her guardian, that he had expressed to her his desire to visit the *Chartreuse*, and that she had persuaded him to introduce himself on her account to Mr. Gordon. During this explanation, the young man blushed more than once; he blushed easily. He volunteered his good offices to Raymond, led him around everywhere, showed him in detail the subterranean chapel, the frescos of Ampoli, the pictures of Fra Angelico.

While on the way, they talked incessantly, and both seemed equally curious; if Raymond besieged his cicerone with questions, the latter, in his turn, seemed to study Raymond attentively. One would have said that they were two hunters, who, ranging the forest in company, were less occupied with the partridges than with feeling each the pulse of the other; it assuredly was not Fra Angelico which interested them the most.

Although Raymond would have preferred to deny it, he was obliged to concede that Mr. Gordon had very fine manners, and an air of distinction, of agreeability, a happy blending of reserve and *abandon*, of modesty and pride. To gentleness of manners, he added a clear, well-balanced mind, a stability of sentiment beyond his age, and a staid dignity, a natural gravity, which rarely forsook him. He never laughed, but there was amiability in his smile. Although rendering him full justice, Raymond could

not conceive how a girl so romantic as Meg had been impressed with these moderate attractions. Mr. Gordon was nothing of an Amadis, except that he was decidedly very young. Precocious as he was in mind and character, had he the strength to govern a little person who was neither docile nor submissive, and would have little taste for curb or rein? Having well weighed the matter, Raymond was confirmed in his resolution to leave the affair in suspense, and to take back the two sachets.

Their tour finished, Mr. Gordon re-conducted Raymond to his cell, where he offered him a collation. As they finished their flask of *Montepulciano*, the young man fell into a reverie: he came out of it to ask, blushing to the whites of his eyes, "And so, monsieur, you are Miss Rovel's guardian? Has she not given you confidences regarding certain letters which I have taken the liberty to write to her?"

"And which you did wrong to send her," interrupted Raymond. "Her mother might have intercepted them, and that would have been a bad thing for Miss Rovel."

"Since she has spoken to you, monsieur," resumed he in an excited voice, "be pleased to hear me in my turn. I do not yet know whether it is my good or my evil star which has led me to meet your ward in Florence; all that I can say is, that, from the first day I saw her, I have felt for her the most ardent love; and I am conscious that this passion, against which I have vainly struggled, will cause the happiness or the unhappiness of my whole life. I regret that my course has displeased you, but my intentions are irreproachable. Deprived of both my parents in early life, I am master of my actions; my fortune is considerable, and I dare to say that I have not abused it; like all the rest of the world, I have my faults, but I know nothing at all of vice, and I have never committed great follies. If the hand of Miss Rovel were granted me, I should feel myself pledged to consecrate to her forever the best of my soul and of my thoughts.

"I confess to you that the reports current in regard to her have caused me lively perplexity; I have heard certain persons speak of her in very ill terms. But other judges, whom I believe more equitable and better informed, have said to me, that we ought to pardon in her some youthful impetuosity, some levity of conduct, for the sake of her perfect nobility of soul. They have affirmed to me, that she is above every low sentiment, above all petty calculations; that her soul is generous, that her faults are the work of the education she has received, that a man who loved her and esteemed her could easily correct and elevate her. It would de-

pend only upon him to make of her a noble and accomplished woman, to establish in duty a will as yet uncertain of itself, but which would be faithful to her choice, and as resolute for the good as it might have been for the evil. As for the rest, monsieur, I should despise a man whom the fear of a little danger restrains from pursuing his fortune, and who would not say to himself, that these are glorious risks, and that happiness is to be won by conquest."

These sentiments uttered in an emphatic and sincere voice, made the most vivid impression upon Raymond, and agitated the very depths of his soul. His emotion had a singular effect. Rising precipitately from his chair, he replied in these few words: "Monsieur, I entirely approve of your sentiments, which do you great honor. It is possible that Miss Rovel might be capable of sacrificing her faults to the man she loves; the misfortune is, that up to this day she has not learned to love, for here is something she charged me to hand to you."

And, taking from his pocket the little bag which held the basil, he hastened to present it to Mr. Gordon, who opened it, and lost countenance. His face changed, his lips quivered: but he knew how to control the violence of his chagrin, and he said to Raymond with a melancholy gentleness, "Please restore to Miss Rovel this poor spray of basil; I may not keep any thing which has belonged to her." He added, "Adieu, monsieur, I cherish no ill will against you. May your conscience bear you witness, that, in speaking to me as you have done, you have only consulted your duty as guardian!"

Raymond set out on the return to Florence with opposing sentiments at war in his heart. He was a little ruffled at Mr. Gordon's last words, and at an insinuation he dreaded fully to comprehend; he was certain that he had a clear conscience, and had performed a good action, and yet he was abashed as if he had committed a bad one; he reproached himself with having been too harsh, and yet, upon the whole, he was more pleased than angry, more satisfied than repentant.

Raymond flattered himself into the belief that he desired nothing better than to find a good match for Miss Rovel; and this was true in theory, so long as the match sought so vainly was a creation of the reason, a metaphysical entity: but, as soon as he assumed form and visage, let him become Italian, French, English, marquis, prince, or let him be named Gordon, and our fastidious guardian would no longer allow him to be spoken of.

They relate, that a certain jeweller had himself fabricated a marvellous jewel of which he was exceedingly proud. He

longed to sell this piece of merchandise, and produced it to every new-comer; but, did any one show a desire to purchase it, he threw all sorts of difficulties in the way; and, as the customer departed, he felt chagrined, and at the same time delighted, that the treasure remained on his hands. You would have very much astonished Raymond by comparing him to this jeweller; and yet he took it upon himself to say, "They are pleased with her; despite her faults, they think her charming; and they do not suspect, that, excepting her beauty, all there is in her amiable and precious comes by right from The Hermitage. Her graces were a diamond in the rough; it is we who have cut and mounted it."

Hence he concluded that he had the right to marry Miss Rovel to whomsoever seemed fitting in his sight, or, indeed, not to marry her at all; and his ill humor he would fain despatch suitors to the devil.

As soon as he arrived in Florence, he repaired to the Cascine, where Lady Rovel and her daughter usually drove at five o'clock. He perceived their carriage arrested in the midst of its course. Two horsemen and three pedestrians formed a circle around one door, paying their homage to Lady Rovel, who, enveloped in her furs, replied to them with an absent air, and a somewhat crusty politeness. Meg had stepped out for a moment, to chat with two young girls, friends of hers. She left them unceremoniously as she saw her guardian approaching, and she ran to meet him. "Ah, well!" cried she in a vibratory and expectant voice.

"I have this instant returned from the Chartreuse d'Ema," said he.

"And what tidings do you bring me?"

"He is a mere lad, and I cannot take him seriously; but he is so well-bred that I shall not permit you to amuse yourself at his expense. That you would be sure to do."

"But he pleases me very much," said she with an aggrieved air. "You did not hand him the basil?"

"Did you not authorize me to do so?"

He saw her visage change, and a serpent began to gnaw at his heart. Meg replied, "You are rather brutal. Well, let it be as you wish! We will try to think no more of each other." She added, "Did he keep the basil?"

"What matters that to you?" asked Raymond, surprised at such a question.

"I would like to know if his love for me is stronger than his self-love. A heart very much infatuated would have carefully preserved such a relic."

"I am sorry for you, but here it is," returned Raymond.

Her arms fell. "Well, then," murmured she, "this poor fellow did not love me so much as he said." Then,

with a faint smile, she added, "You are not at the end of your researches; mamma's wish must be carried out, and you will have to look for another."

Having thus spoken, she returned to her young friends, and began to talk gayly with them; but Raymond thought he perceived a little effort in her gayety, a gleam of fever in her eyes.

VIII.

To bestir one's legs is oftentimes a method of diverting one's thoughts. The next day Raymond went out at an early hour, and passed his time in roaming over Florence, that marvellous city, in which it seems as if nothing could be changed without spoiling it, but which the most intelligent mayors still find means of embellishing. He carefully reviewed all that had impressed him during his first sojourn, visiting anew some of those palaces which have been compared to fortresses adorned by art. He contemplated *Sainte Marie Nouvelle*, the *chefs-d'œuvre* of Ghirlandajo, Michael Angelo's poems in marble, the *Grisailles* which Andrea del Sarto painted in the cells of a cloister of barefooted friars, the Saint George of Donatello, and his Little David with the rustic shepherd's cap of the Apennines, holding in one hand the sword of the overthrown giant, and in the other the victorious sling.

In the Badia he gazed for a long time at the handsome Saint Bernard of Filippino Lippi, who, occupied in writing, sees the Madonna appear, and lets his pen fall; in the chapel of Brancaccio he paused to admire the frescos of Masaccio, the Resurrection of Eutychus, Saint Peter Baptizing, and his Dispute with Simon the Magician,—compositions of an incomparable reality, whose personages are honest Florentine *bourgeois*, not failing to move at their ease in the midst of the greatest events, and evidently born for the grandest situations.

Raymond also visited the ancient quarter of Florence, the market, and that venerable stone boar with the paternal countenance, the good genius of the place, whom mothers and children emulate each other in honoring. In the evening, promenading on the quays, he found opportunity to admire one of those citron-colored sunsets of which Meg had boasted to him. The horizon was of the most tender yellow with delicate shadings of gray and green; the cypresses of the Villa Strozzi throwing their dusky silhouettes upon the background. The Arno, reflecting all these tints in its limpid waters, bore its part in the lovely spectacle, and shared this festivity of the skies.

Raymond recalled to mind that he was

to "assist" at another fête, where he was expected to appear in an Arabic costume; at the same moment he was forced to aver to himself, that, if his legs were weary, neither Michael Angelo nor Masaccio had conjured up the disquietudes of his mind. He returned to his hotel, and found that the costumer had kept his word. Toward eleven o'clock, he plucked up resolution to make his toilet. He thrust his feet into thick sheepskin sandals, put on a silk robe, and a camel's-hair mantle embroidered with gold. He adjusted upon his head a black peruke with long tresses, around which he twisted the *keffie*, or white handkerchief, letting one end hang down his back, and the other two fall in front of his shoulders. Around the *keffie*, he wound a cord; then he gazed at himself in the glass. The man he saw there, and who produced upon him the effect of an apparition, had passed two years in Arabia, absorbed in dreams of love which fortune had betrayed; and this treason had rendered him a misanthrope. He thoroughly examined his own heart; and he made up his mind, that Madame de P. was nothing more to him, that he was astonished at himself for having ever loved her so much, for having so deeply regretted her, and so deeply cursed her. He also came to the conclusion, that this pretty woman was ugly in comparison with a young girl of seventeen and a half years, whom, night before last, he had seen enter a *salon*, dressed in rose-color, and attract all glances. He very properly recalled to mind, that this beauty was his ward, that he had the charge of getting her married, and that, as a preliminary, he had for three days past been endeavoring to disgust her with all the suitors who had at all struck her fancy. The situation was a strange one; how should he withdraw from it? He did not know, and, for the time being, he did not care to know.

When Raymond entered Lady Rovel's house, midnight had just struck, and the ball was at the height of its splendor and animation. He could scarce make his way through the motley array of masks that swarmed on all sides. There were Turks, Andalusians, Tartars, Laplanders, Hindoos, Chinese, and Burmans. Three *salons*, magnificently lighted, superbly decorated, formed a vast enfilade, upon which opened cabinets, whose doors had been torn from their hinges, and where amid garlands of light were hung all sorts of tropical plants. They were dancing in one of the *salons*; the second was consecrated to the joyous divinities, to amorous pursuits, to intrigue; in the third, all supped *à la carte*. Then there were little side rooms for the use of the timid and melancholy, for philosophers, and also for those happy couples who have nothing

more to seek, because they have already found that for which they sought.

It was the first time Raymond had been present at a mask-ball, and his first impression was a sort of superstitious terror. Nothing is more redoubtable to the imagination than the mask. That invisible visage which you try to define, does it prepare for you a temptation, a danger, or a cruel mistake? That mysterious glance which seeks yours, does it contain a promise or a menace? This unknown mouth, which all of a sudden has whispered two words in your ear, maybe possesses the secret of your destiny. This elevated finger, which afar off has made a sign to you, is, perhaps, your evil genius which has recognized you, and summons you.

"Faithful image of life!" thought Raymond, "in so far as life deceives us, and we take its mask for a true visage. The day when life awakens us from our error, by showing herself to us as she is, we raise a cry of horror, and we escape despair only through the acquiescence of our moral natures."

In the midst of his reasoning, he perceived that people were staring at him a great deal; not that his simple costume was particularly worthy of remark, but because he wore it to perfection. Amid this variegated throng, he was the only mask who had not a disguised air. He was Arab from head to foot; Arab in his gait, in his manner, in the feline suppleness of his movements, in that barbaric pride which had but yesterday formed friendship with the solitudes of Nedjed, and which in all places carried the desert with it.

A Chinese approached to gain information as to our Arabian's civil rank. He replied in the language of the Koran, that he loved not questions; and the questioner went away convinced that Lady Rovel had given herself the pleasure of inviting a real Bedouin to her ball.

In virtue of this opinion, he kept the indiscreet at a distance; and, making himself a path through the crowd, he penetrated to the dancing *salon*. Leaning against a column, he first sought a glimpse of Lady Rovel. He easily recognized her in a stately Japanese empress, whose unbound hair, falling down her shoulders, was confined by a knot of brilliants. Her flowing, imperial vestments, draped with infinite art, enveloped her in a wavy mass of gauze and crape; her magnificent brocaded mantle swept the floor. She held in her hand a fan of white cedar, and upon her head towered a diadem surmounted by triple bands of gold. Her crown betrayed her less than her countenance, and her grand air. In a masque-

rade Lady Rovel enjoyed every advantage, and had no rivalry to fear. Her *tournure*, her unparalleled figure, her carriage of the head, the undulations of her swan-like neck, assured her an uncontested triumph.

Raymond's next concern was the discovery of Miss Rovel; he was about to give it up, when a joyous peal of laughter raised a few steps from him, by a young Armenian princess, caused him to turn his head. He recognized that crystal laugh which Prince Natti considered so adorable, and so calculated to drive a man to despair. Meg had been most happy in the choice of her costume. Ample white trousers descended to her ankles; upon her bare feet were yellow morocco slippers. Her silk robe was confined at the waist by a sash with pendent fringes; and above her robe she wore a large-sleeved jacket embroidered with silver. Her abundant hair, sown with flowers, sequins, and pearls, formed long plaits which wound around her neck and shoulders. Her little cap of chased gold, perched over her right ear, seemed made expressly to provoke gods and men.

Meg was dancing a quadrille with a noble Venetian cavalier in a slashed doublet with a great plaited ruff, and a plumed cap, his breast adorned with a rich chain of gold. This cavalier and his partner exchanged many glances through the sockets of their masks; they would now and then whisper into each other's ear, and Meg would laugh. For the second time Raymond felt a serpent bite at his heart. "She has jested with me," said he to himself; "it is not the Chartreuse d'Ema which lodges the enemy."

He left his column, and, passing into the adjoining *salon*, joined a group, where, perspiring great drops under his furs, a microscopic Kalmuc was thus haranguing in an assumed voice:—

"Gentlemen, the Empress of Japan is a noble empress whom I venerate; but she has ruinous fancies which ere long will drain her strong-box dry. When she gives a fête, we have the most sumptuous bill of fare, she exhausts all her powers in garnishing her *salons* with the whole flora of the tropics, and her cabinets are hung with vines from which you gather grapes. Here is a little entertainment that will cost well on to fifty thousand francs. I fear that she will leave to the princess her daughter only a glorious memory, a straw-bed, and her debts."

"Oh, that villanous Kalmuc!" cried a tall young man with a figure very much like that of Duke Lisca. "Why do you take pains to counterfeit your voice? It is in vain for the cuckoo to change his register; we recognize him by his shrill song."

This saucy interruption came very near

leading to an altercation, prudence sometimes being at the mercy of wounded self-love. Happily, the quadrille being ended, there was a great movement of passing from one room to the other; the surge bore on the Kalmuc, his rage, and his vengeance. To place his Oriental gravity beyond the reach of all confusion, Raymond withdrew into a corner, where he had not remained a long time, when a graceful Armenian, as if borne upon a wave, floated over to him, coquettishly inclining her head.

"My heart is stirred with emotion," she said. "What a handsome Abdallah do I see! If his first word is to upbraid me, I will declare to the whole universe that this is the man I seek."

"Princess," replied Raymond, "leave, I implore you, the Arabian at peace in his desert."

"The desert is his domain," replied she, "his delight, his dearest love; but I have the audacity to seek him here, for I wish him to scold me. Oh, sweet chidings, which like the dew from heaven fall alike upon innocent and guilty heads! Let us see, Monsieur Arab, how many misdemeanors have I already committed this evening? None at all, for we have promised our dear mamma to be staid as an image, and we shall religiously keep our word."

"And yet," returned the Arab, "there is one misdemeanor with which a certain Carthusian would have the right to reproach you; you are singularly prompt in consoling yourself."

"That which is done, is done," answered she, "and that which is done by you is well done. You have said to me, 'You must love no more,' and I try to love no more. I take pains to divert my thoughts. It seems to me, in truth, that I have succeeded to-night. These masks, these flowers, these lights, this music, these sweet things they murmur into my ear, and, to crown all, an atrabilious and hypochondriac guardian, who deigns to watch over my virtue, and who would restore it to me if I should chance to lose it—indeed, what is there wanting to my happiness? Ah, Seigneur Abdallah, how amusing it is to live!"

"Very amusing indeed," replied he in a bitter tone, "especially for one who has no heart."

"Are you very sure that I have none at all? It seems to me, for my part, that I have four of them, all beating anew, all demanding employment; four, I tell you! Do you want one of them? If so, I will give it to you."

Twice he turned his head from right to left, and from left to right. "Thanks!" said he, "I should feel some scruple as to rendering your collection incomplete."

"Oh the charming Arabic character!"

cried she. "What amenity of soul he has! Do not open your eyes so wide; this evening we are two masks talking together; to-morrow I shall return to the most humble respect. I shall kiss the ground before you."

The orchestra struck up a *ritournelle*.

"To prove to you the immense esteem I have for you," resumed she, "if you wish to dance this polka with me, I will break my engagement with the gentleman who has invited me."

"I beg to be excused!" said he with an evasive gesture; "you will pardon me for not disturbing your pleasures."

He started to withdraw, but, having gone some steps, he turned his head, and saw Miss Rovel entering the dancing-room on the arm of the same Venetian in the frilled ruff, who had the secret of making her laugh. Raymond felt himself invaded by a sombre melancholy, blent with a dumb resentment. Not knowing to whom to attribute it, he attributed it to all the world; and to escape the noise, the merriment, the jubilant notes which chagrined his ear, he took refuge in a little gallery set apart for smoking, but which he found deserted, the smokers being all at supper. He threw himself upon a divan, rested his elbow upon a cushion, his forehead in his hand, and plunged into a revery whose conclusion was, that if the hall where a certain Armenian girl was dancing with a Venetian had just taken fire, and if all it contained was about to perish in the conflagration, he should perhaps feel some sorrow, but most certainly an immense relief. He was in the mood to torment himself over this case of conscience, like a dog gnawing at a bone, when he heard behind him an imperious voice saying, —

"At last I find a man, and this man is an *ennuyé* Bedouin."

He turned around, he arose. The Empress of Japan was gazing at him attentively, her arms crossed upon her breast. Drawing nearer she made a sign for him to be seated, and took her place at his side. "Be frank," she said: "you are *ennuyé* exceedingly."

"Your majesty does me wrong," responded he; "does she not perceive that for a little while I would withdraw my feeble eyes from the dazzling splendor of the fête she is giving to her subjects?"

"I have never loved bears who give themselves graces," said she: "their trade is to growl, and every one should remain true to his nature. Confess that you are a great deal displeased with what you see and hear; confess also that you are very proud."

"Ah, madame, I am assuredly so at all times when you deign to occupy yourself with me."

She struck a sharp blow upon the divan

with her fan. "I tell you, I myself, that your pride is insupportable, and that in this you somewhat resemble me. We, you and I, are two proud hermits, and it is from this sword that we shall die."

"So be it! What matters it?"

"Let us either die immediately, or marry our mutual prides, our solitudes, and our *ennuis*. There are bad viands which, adroitly mixed, sometimes make good enough dishes."

"This supposes a skilful cook, and I am the worst of spoiled sauces."

"Who asks you to mix yourself in? You will unite with me in this matter. I wish to try once again to get rid of my *ennui*; and I have a desire to perform some extraordinary feat in conjunction with you."

"Very well, madame. Shall we go and seat ourselves together on the highest steeple of Florence?"

"That steeple would be only a jest. I have descended the Bernina. You do not guess where I wish to meet you?"

"No, madame: I would like to find out."

"How lacking you are in comprehension! I have resolved to go with you to Mecca."

"There," cried he, "is an enterprise fitted to endure and conquer difficulties" —

"If it were easy, it could not tempt me. Now listen to me. We must be in haste about stowing Meg safely away. I accept for her, in advance, whatever imbecile you may patronize. This anxiety off our hands, let us depart for Cairo; you shall teach me Arabic. As soon as I have learned it, you shall disguise me as you please, and the rest is my affair. I have come to the conclusion that I ought not to leave this world without having seen Mecca, and that I shall see it with you."

Raymond thought she jested, and feigned to enter into the jest. She grew excited, then angry; and he was obliged to take her project seriously. His embarrassment was extreme. He multiplied objections; but she had a response for all.

"What should I do," asked he, "if, in despite of my precautions, some fanatical Mussulman should take it into his head to marry you?"

"You would defend me against him. Is this task beyond your courage?"

"No; but perhaps beyond my strength, without taking into the account other risks which I should dread more." And, thinking to acquit himself toward her by a little flattery, he added, "Who will defend me myself against you?"

"Explain yourself. I hate rigmarole and nonsense."

"I apprehend, madame, that you would

subject my philosophy to many certain perils."

"You wish to say that you are afraid you may fall in love with me. Where would be the harm, if I permit it? It would divert me exceedingly. Your awkwardness, your sullenness, your crabbed ardors, your suppressed passion, would please me infinitely. You remember that shepherdess of whom Shakspeare speaks, who never told her love, but let her passion, concealed like a worm in the bud, prey on her damask cheek. Pale and melancholy, she sat like Patience on a monument, smiling at grief. I should love to see you in that position."

"Your wish will not be gratified. I am the least patient of men, and I have never smiled at grief."

"I, too, have a crotchety disposition," resumed she. "Perhaps you would make me compassionate; perhaps, if your pride thought it would be dishonored in asking, mine, more complaisant, would spare you that trouble."

"O sovereign of Japan!" cried he, "how precious are your favors! but how haughty are your caprices! How unforeseen are your requitals! We lower mortals make our experiments at our own expense; your majesty makes hers at the expense of others."

She replied dryly, "I am sometimes myself deceived; what proves to you that I deceive myself to-day?"

"The sentiment I have of my nothingness, and my remembrance of an avowal you made to me not long since. If I were so foolish as to believe in my happiness, you would very soon dispel my illusion by repeating to me these words: 'Have you not discovered that I love only myself?' Nothing would remain for me but to kill myself."

"And if even that should happen?" she said in a panting voice. "A beautiful dream followed by a beautiful death, — what can one wish better here below?"

At these words, she lifted the diadem from her head, and placed it on her knees; then inclining toward Raymond, and gazing at him with glowing eyes, she murmured in English, "Perhaps I will give you all it is in my power to give;" and Raymond comprehended that these words, uttered in her native tongue, meant in his, *Peut-être vous donnerai-je tout ce que je puis donner.*

He was at the end of his rôle, and remained with closed lips, not knowing what to do or say in order to extricate himself from this false position, and rid himself of a happiness which would have been the envy of so many mortals and demigods. His silence was so prolonged, that Lady Rovel, growing impatient, hastily detached her satin mask, and showed him her beautiful face all aglow

with passion, and beaming with an enchanting smile, which promised him all the intoxications, the felicities, the beatitudes, of Mahomet's paradise.

He suddenly recovered his *sang-froid* bowed gravely in the Oriental fashion, and replied in a firm, almost rude tone, "Your beauty affrights me, madame, and you propose to me terrible risks; but the prophet has said, 'Games of chance are accursed of God; abstain from them: it is the secret of happiness.'"

How describe what was passing in Lady Rovel's soul? Nothing like this had ever come to her. This haughty divinity who set herself at so high a price, who had seen a nation of adorers prostrate before her altar, who had made them purchase her least favors through a painful novitiate, through long humiliations, for the first time had taken a fancy to make an offer of herself; and she had experienced the insupportable outrage of a refusal. Was it possible? Was she dreaming? The man who had just said *No*, was he of flesh and bones, or a shadow, or a statue, a cold, insensate marble? Astonishment, confusion, shame, resentment, fury, agitated her whole being; her blood boiled in her veins. She could have wished to feel growing at her fingers' ends the claws of a true Saharian lioness, to plunge them into the face of this insolent man; or, better still, she could have wished that her glances should change to lightnings, and consume him to ashes. She considered for a moment whether she should plunge into his heart the poniard she wore at her girdle, or if she should content herself with breaking her fan over his head, or if she should arm herself with one of her imperial slippers, and slap him on his two cheeks, or if she should order her servants to throw him out of the window, or if she should dash in pieces the crystal chandeliers which had been witnesses of the affront offered her, or if she should simply give vent to her outraged feelings in tears, find herself suddenly ill, and faint away?

As soon as she could recover from the tumult of her thoughts, care for her wounded dignity gained mastery over her rage. She again placed the crown upon her head, re-adjusted her mask, rose, and hurled at Raymond a glance of inexpressible disdain, which should literally have swept him from the face of the earth; and, withdrawing, she said half aloud, "What an idiotic animal this haughty Bedouin is! and how easy it is to hoax him!"

CHAPTER IX.

Raymond had felt the thunderbolt falling upon him; it crushed, almost annihi-

lated him. Slowly and painfully he gathered up the pieces. He had just finished stitching them together, he had succeeded in entirely re-constructing himself, and, fearing an aggressive return of the enemy, he was about leaving the gallery to lose his identity in the crowd, when his passage was barred by Miss Rovel, who, taking his hand, obliged him to retrace his steps.

"What has happened between you and mamma?" she asked in an excited tone.

He replied with a shrug of the shoulders, "What makes you think that any thing has happened?"

"Mamma has just now spoken a few words to me, and her voice trembled with rage. Treat me, I pray you, like a reasonable, responsible being, capable of understanding things, and from whom no concealments are necessary. You have my confidence, I wish to have yours."

"As to that, Miss Rovel, I imagine we are quite even."

"Another blow; but why is mamma furious?"

"Since you demand to know, she has remarked with great displeasure the intimacy which exists between you and a certain young cavalier whose cap is adorned with a white plume."

"If I believed a word you say," replied she, "I should pray you to go and tell her from me that I am very indifferent to this cavalier."

"I took it upon myself to declare that fact to her, and I also assured her that you had not danced with him a single time this evening."

"How disagreeable you are with your sarcasms! I dance with him because he dances well, but you have persuaded me that basset is dearer to him than I am. I could never love a man capable of having other thoughts when he spoke of me."

"But this does not prevent your taking great delight in his society."

"Ah, how well you wish to that white plume! Have I not told you that it is my habit to 'bark with wolves, and talk nonsense with fools'? It is a very nice society talent. Good heavens!" exclaimed she. "It would delight me to have a secret, just for the pleasure of confessing it to you; but I vow to you that I have none."

"Do not believe her; she lies; it is Merlin who tells you so!" cried a hoarse, hollow voice, which seemed to proceed from the depths of a cavern; and they saw advancing toward them a grotesque being with humped back and bowed head; a creature very like the Seigneur Montesinos with whom Don Quixote had a singular conversation, and who, at the risk of receiving a thousand blows from Sancho's staff, persisted in treating of apocryphal subjects.

The new-comer was muffled up in a long violet robe falling to his heels; a green satin hood enveloped his breast and shoulders. A cap of ribbed black velvet covered his venerable head, and his white beard descended below his girdle. Following the example of Montesinos, he wore a rosary around his left arm. I really do not know whether "the beads thereon were larger than walnuts," and if "the tenth equalled in size the egg of an ostrich." In his right hand he brandished an ebony wand.

For an instant Meg gazed in silence at this apparition, then she began to laugh. "It appears to me, Seigneur Merlin," said she, disguising her voice, "that, saving your presence, politeness is not the virtue of enchanters. It is probable that you are as subtle as courteous. Endeavor to tell me who I am, and we shall know what to think of your penetration."

"When you wish us not to recognize you," replied he, hemming to clear his throat, "keep from laughing, beautiful Armenian. That laugh, sparkling as a rocket, fresher than a brook that bounds over its pebbly bed, more joyous than a linnet in the depths of the forest, and which yet eats into the heart like a drop of corrosive aquafortis into a copper plate, — that laugh, young girl, can belong only to a blonde whose eyes are black; this fact it needs no magic to divine."

"You are less simple than I thought," replied she. "You affirm, then, that I have a secret? Do me the favor of informing me what it is."

He shook his head. "That is the most inconsiderate of wishes," he said. "My beautiful child, preserve your ignorance as a treasure: the repose of your life depends upon it."

"I am not satisfied with evasions, Seigneur Merlin, and I see that you are a metaphysician, as well as I."

"Since you are so imprudent as to set me at defiance," replied he, "learn, angel double of a demon, that, unknown to yourself, you adore a man whom for some time you believed you detested, — a man who inspires in you an insurmountable antipathy, and whom, wrongly or rightly, you treat as a pedant. This man is the Arabian we see here," pursued he, stretching toward Raymond his ebony wand.

Raymond blushed to the whites of his eyes, and at this moment he blessed the useful invention of masks. He directed a menacing gesture toward Merlin, to close his mouth. Meg repressed her excitement, and with the greatest composure said to him, "Ay, indeed, monsieur! one does not get angry at a carnival jest." Then turning to the old man, she added, "My little fellow, your simplicity only equals your self-sufficiency."

The enchanted wand which you hold in your hand, has it not revealed to you that this Arabian is my guardian? How long is it since young girls have fallen in love with their guardians?"

"Since Rosina was subjected to such great misfortunes for not having married hers," responded he gravely; "since that joyous creature ended by becoming *La Mere Coupable*, which is in truth the most lachrymose, the most insipid piece that ever insulted the footlights."

"Oh! let us not speak of literature," said she, "that is not my forte. Since you are so skilful in deciphering souls, you can do no better than to occupy yourself a little with that of my guardian. Has he a secret, — even he?"

"Miss Rovel," exclaimed Raymond, "I must beg you not to mix me in with these stupid jests."

"We know not what fate awaits us, who is to live, or who to die," replied she. "To-morrow, if such is your desire, we will be solemn as the iron-barred gate of The Hermitage. To night, I intend to talk nonsense to the joy of my heart. Speak now, man of the sepulchral voice! Has my guardian a secret?"

"Your guardian, mademoiselle," replied he, "appears to me to be a very hot-headed, dangerous man. Before replying to the questions of Achilles, Calchas, who did not love to risk his life, made Achilles promise to defend him against the resentment of Agamemnon."

"Have no fear, Calchas! I take you under my protection."

He scratched his ear, then he cried, "O ye inspiring gods, guide my tongue in this delicate conjuncture! teach me the art of making all understood without saying an offensive word, the art of divesting the truth of its dart and its poison!" And, passing his hand over his beard, he seemed to be re-collecting his thoughts.

"There are men, my beautiful child," resumed he, "who, with a tender heart, possess the most intractable pride; they have decided that love is an unworthy weakness, the most humiliating of subjections; they have called heaven and earth to witness that they will love no more, and they would be hung rather than recant. These individuals are like the gardener's dog who swore that he would not eat, and did not eat, but who would no longer hear of any other dog's eating. Beautiful blonde with the black eyes, if you wish to marry, break with your guardian, for you will never marry the man you love, and he will prevent your marrying him you do not love."

"This insolent badinage has lasted too long," cried Raymond beside himself: "I wish to know what juggler is hidden under this violet robe."

Speaking thus, he darted toward the

magician with a menace of the head so ferocious, that he, concerned for his safety, forgetting his age, and the whiteness of his beard, suddenly drew up his crooked back, and stood erect upon his two legs in the attitude of a boxer ready to play at fisticuffs. Meanwhile, several masks entered, followed by a servant who bore a salver laden with sherbets. There was a moment of confusion, by which Merlin profited to escape. Raymond followed in pursuit, but lost the trace. After many tours and detours, he thought he perceived the magician in the midst of a group; upon approaching, he found that he had been mistaken, and ran vainly over the palace. The ebony wand and the violet robe had vanished like an apparition.

While he was engrossed in this search, Miss Rovel had re-entered the second *salon*. She was soon accosted by the cavalier in the white plume, who had so displeased Raymond. He drew her into the embrasure of a window, and, in order to mislead certain curious persons who were prowling around them, they indulged in two conversations, the one in a loud, intelligible voice, the latter in a tone rapid, repressed, indistinct as the buzzing of a fly.

"The day has been superb," cried the prince, as if he were speaking of indifferent things.

"Superb indeed," responded she.

"I did not see you at the Cascine."

"That is a promenade which does not please me every day."

"The Princess de B. was there. With her gay dress, her crooked nose, and her carnation cheeks, she resembled, as they say, a parrot eating a cherry." Then he whispered low, "I await your answer; it will decide whether I am to be the happiest of men, or whether upon returning home I blow out my brains."

"I shall be in despair," murmured she from the corners of her lips, "if misfortune should come to the handsomest man in Italy, and I do not love romances which turn into tragedies."

"But this may become one; you have rendered me mad; my head is no longer my own."

"Do not kill yourself; I would prefer for you to run away with me; but can you not find something else that would answer just as well?"

"What now? Have we not agreed, that, in order to marry you, I am forced to resort to desperate means?"

"This is easily said," sighed she. "But an elopement, an elopement! That is impossible here."

He raised his voice anew to say to her, —

"*Apropos*, were you present the other evening, at the concert of the famous Polish pianist?"

"They assure me," replied she, "that he has a great deal of talent."

"Doubtless; but there is wanting to this Pole that—what shall I call it?—that divine wickedness which constitutes genius."

"Then in your estimation one must be a man fit to be hung in order to be a grand pianist."

"To excel in any thing, whatever it may be, one must give one's self to the devil," replied he. And he went on in a very low tone, "Why is an elopement impossible here? Are you not left to do about as you please?"

She replied in the same tone, "Do you not understand, that, if you elope with me from her own house, mamma will consider herself defied, and, for her whole life long, will never pardon such an affront? What would become of our marriage?"

"Then please tell me, what shall we do?"

"It is all very simple," said she, placing her fan before her mouth. "I shall have to go to The Hermitage, near Geneva, to the house of my guardian. It is a house where you might die of *ennui*, but where I am free as air."

"Ah! Allow me to say that your guardian does not appear to me like an obliging man."

"He translates Lucretius, and passes life with his nose in his books. I defy you to take one single volume from his library without his knowing it; but, if you were to deprive him of his ward, he would require twenty-four hours to perceive it."

Some one, apparently a listener, had approached, and was pricking up his ears. Passing from the *pianissimo* to the *forte*, Meg cried out, "Is it true, seigneur, that you yesterday lost a large sum at play?"

"Alas, yes, beautiful Armenian; we have sustained a great loss, but we shall make it up to-morrow."

"Ah, well! I admire you; for, despite this great loss, you have been in a charming humor to-night."

"Oh!" replied he, laughing, "I never allow my troubles to disturb my pleasures. Those are two parts in my life which have nothing in common. I use them like that Englishman, who, dining at an inn, found a hair in his stew. 'Put that aside,' said he; 'I will take it when I want it.'"

The listener, frustrated in his design, had just turned away his glances and his ears. Lowering his voice, and turning his eyes away, the cavalier said to Meg, "And how shall you manage about going to The Hermitage?"

Meg sheltered herself anew behind her fan. "Listen well to me," she said;

"mamma has declared, that, if I am the voluntary or involuntary cause of the least scandal, she shall pray my guardian to seek a boarding-school for me. I shall well know how to force it to offer me its hospitality."

"Heavens! What have you in your mind? And so we are going to give cause for a little scandal?"

"You see that cockade at my right ear?" responded she in a voice that was but a breath. "I shall let it fall; you shall pick it up; you shall boast that I have given it to you. I shall immediately dispatch a Kalmuc to you, with an order to silence you; and I allow you to unsheathe the sword."

"Divine invention!" said he. "And this Kalmuc shall be the Marquis de Boisgenêt? Do you authorize me to make bacon of him?"

"Mercy! You are not to do him the least harm; it will serve our purpose to make some noise, but well-born children do not kill their drummer." Then, kissing her hand to her interlocutor, she added in a loud voice, "You have this evening given me a lesson in wisdom from which I shall profit. Who does not find a hair in his pottage or in his life? Following your example, I will take it by itself, and I shall eat only of that which pleases me."

She withdrew; and, two seconds after, the pretty cockade lay upon the floor. Sylvio stooped hurriedly, and picked it up. Having fastened it upon his breast with a pin, he went and posted himself in the most sightly place of the *salon*, and remained there with crossed arms, gazing vaingloriously upon his trophy.

Meantime, Meg had darted off in pursuit of the Marquis de Boisgenêt. She at last discovered him at a buffet, where in a corner by himself he was draining in small draughts a flask of Burgundian wine. He was in a melancholy vein, and broken by fatigue. Never had his functions as factotum weighed so heavily upon his little shoulders; and, to recompense him for his pains, Lady Rovel had just taken it upon herself to inform him that Mirette, having introduced herself into a quadrille, had received a kick, and had set up the most dolorous yelps. Let us add to this, that he had all the evening sustained a running fire of jeers, epigrams, and railleries, and that, having tried several times to procure himself an interview with Meg, that perfidious girl had slipped like an eel between his fingers. He could not digest so many humiliations, and the best wine of Burgundy seemed bitter to him.

All at once, he felt a supple hand upon his shoulder, and a charming Armenian said to him, "At last I find you, O most amiable of the Kalmucs!"

"What does this mean?" cried he in a very morose tone; "you all know how to find me when you need me. What lustre has been extinguished? Does the trombone want breath, and am I to supply it from my own mouth? Have they a second time trampled upon Mirette, and must I bathe her with arnica? Am I to climb up by a ladder, and take the moon between my teeth?"

"Jacob, did he not serve seven years to merit Rachel?" asked the softest voice.

"Rachel did not make sport of Jacob," replied he furiously; "Rachel was not an arrant coquette; Rachel did not ten times a day say yes with her eyes, and no with her lips; Rachel did not allow herself to be fooled by coxcombs; and, above all, Rachel had no guardian. You understand me, Miss Rovel, no guardian. Leave me, and let me drown my sorrows in the glass."

"Very well!" said she; "you would be capable of drowning there your hopes also."

She sat down beside him, and, by means of her pretty caressing ways, she succeeded, although with some difficulty, in cajoling him a little. Then she cried out suddenly, "There is only one word that answers, and that is Yes or No. Are you my chevalier?"

"What do you mean, Miss Rovel?"

"I mean that a coxcomb is about to compromise me, and that you take the affair in a strange fashion."

"In what fashion would you like to have me take it, since I do not know the first word about it?"

"A chevalier divines all, he is so jealous of his lady's honor."

This last sentence inundated the heart of the marquis with delight. "In what way does any one seek to compromise you?" he asked.

"That cockade which I wore in my hair, which I thought so charming, which I had promised to give you" —

"Upon my honor, I doubt that," interrupted he.

"When Rachel promises, it is with the eyes," said she. "I designed for you to have it by and by; but that impertinent fellow of whom I speak has carried it away; he exhibits it everywhere, declaring that I have given it to him, and that he is at last on the very best terms with the Armenian."

M. de Boisgenêt started up excitedly. "Who is the scoundrel?" cried he.

"You see him over there; that tall young man in the plaited ruff."

"Is not that Prince Natti?" asked he; and with a dreamy eye he gazed upon the chair he had just left.

"Ah! now I think of it," said she, "I would not wish to involve you in any

trouble with this formidable man; and I am going this instant in search of my guardian."

"No, you are not! Do not speak to me of your abominable guardian!" cried M. de Boisgenêt dancing around as if she had lashed him with a whip. "This affair concerns only me; I hasten to reclaim my property, and to rescue your honor."

He poured out a bumper of red wine, drained it at a draught to confirm his resolution; then with a brisk, warlike eye, he surveyed group after group, and at last found the man in the ruff, who was haranguing a dozen masks ranged in a circle around him, and defying them to guess from whom came his cockade.

M. de Boisgenêt approached valiantly, and cried out to him, "Monsieur, have the obligingness to restore to me as quickly as possible the knot of ribbons you wear upon your right shoulder; the person from whom you took it has charged me to reclaim it."

"The jest is a little too preposterous," drawled he. "If the fantastic princess who bestowed upon me this precious gift has regretted her liberality, I only know what to do about it; and I shall defend the gift to my last breath, against all the Kalmucs, the Laplanders, and the Samaians in the universe."

At these words, he drew his sword without crying "Beware," and set about making such terrible flourishes with it, that M. de Boisgenêt, astonished at so spirited a response, recoiled five or six paces. His precipitate retreat set all around to laughing. He became furious at having been afraid, and in his fury he feared nothing more.

He cast his eyes hither and thither to discover a weapon; at length, in the lack of a better, he seized upon the switch a Magyar carried in one of his riding-boots, and began to fence with it; whereupon the adversary gave him a back blow which sent him bounding to the ceiling. His rage knew no further limits; he danced and whirled around the redoubtable blade, hoping always to find it in default. He exposed himself so much that the prince, fearing lest he might run him through, gave back a foot. The game might perhaps have ended fatally, if M. de Boisgenêt had not slipped upon a piece of lemon-peel, and fallen to the floor. He lay there extended his whole length, his head resting against a marble pedestal which supported a bust. At the same moment a Bedouin, who had been a silent spectator of this passage-at-arms, and who, unknown to Sylvio, had come and taken position behind him, adroitly stretched forth his hand, and snatched away the cockade.

It was Prince Natti's turn to be furious. He rushed at the audacious thief, but he raised an exclamation of horror in finding

Miss Rovel at the end of his sword. "Prince, what are you thinking of?" cried she; "this is my guardian." The white-plumed chevalier was most lavish of excuses, and returned his sword to its scabbard, while Raymond, who had preserved his usual self-composure, tranquilly replaced the cockade in Meg's hair. Meantime the marquis, much stunned by his fall, arose with great difficulty, and in a querulous voice called for a handkerchief to bind up his forehead.

Although this scene had lasted only a few minutes, it had caused a lively commotion. In seeing Prince Natti unsheathe his sword, one woman had fainted, and several others had raised piercing cries. The masqueraders had rushed up from all sides, the orchestra had become silent. As M. de Boisgenêt had fallen with his face to the floor, the report had spread from one to another, that a man in a wide ruff had killed a Kalmuc.

This report reached the ears of Lady Rovel; an instant after, she was at the scene of action, a prey to the most lively irritation, indignant as astonished that her house had been so scandalized. Tearing off her mask, she darted ferocious glances all around her. Some one venturing to remind her that the dying man lay at her feet, she gazed at him vindictively, as if she would call him to account for the false alarm, or would reproach him for having lost, in not having really died, the only occasion offered him to make himself interesting.

"Marquis," said she to him without taking time to choose her words, "you are a fool; go and get your wounds dressed by my maid-servants." Then with a Roxana-like gesture, she said to the prince, "Leave!" And, bending down to her daughter, she hissed in her ear, "Withdraw into your chamber!" Finally, turning to Raymond, she flung him a glance which fell upon him disdainfully, pitilessly, like a vulture swooping down upon a crane. "Monsieur," commanded she in a terrible voice, "come to me to-morrow about noon; I have two or three words to say to you."

She then ordered the music to strike up; the dancing began again; quiet was by degrees re-established, but not in the soul of Raymond Ferray. Half an hour later, he regained his hotel, carrying in his head two or three orchestras, a cohort of masks, all the peoples and all the costumes of the earth, Japanese furies, Armenian wiles and deceits, plaited ruffs, beards like that of Montesinos, sword-thrusts, and cockades.

He employed the dusky morning hours, which should have been given to slumber, in communion with his thoughts; it seemed to him that they, too, wore a mask, and that he in vain endeavored to distin-

guish their faces, so wildly did they gambol and pirouette around him to the sounds of a diabolical music.

When the first beams of day penetrated his chamber, he was obliged to confess that these four walls enclosed only a discomfited philosopher, for whom all physics and metaphysics reduced themselves to one sole idea; which was to divine a certain little girl's secret, and to find out exactly what was passing in her heart, supposing she had one.

X.

AFTER a short drowse, Raymond rose, and was getting ready to go to Lady Rovel at the appointed hour, when he was handed a note which Pamela had brought. It was as follows:—

"I have many things to say to you, my dear guardian, and I have only a moment. Excuse the writing and the rest.

"1st, I wish to set your mind at ease in regard to an incident about which you were wrong to become so much excited. I imagine that our famous magician in the white beard, who, when you take sides against him, assumes the attitude of an English boxer, may perhaps be only a harmless Scotchman by the name of Gordon. If my conjecture is true, the scene he played for us may be a vengeance in its way, where he placed all the wit at his own disposal. Think of it no more, if, indeed, you still are thinking of it.

"2d, My beautiful and adorable mamma is in such a humor to-day! She is furious at you (I know not why), furious at handsome Sylvio because he allowed himself to draw the sword in her house, furious at me, whom she very unjustly considers the prime cause of this scandalous quarrel. Heaven be praised! she is no less furious at M. de Boisgenêt. She bears a grudge against him for having made himself so awkward and ridiculous last evening, and especially for having presumed to pass for dead when he was still alive. She called him a fool in your presence; he cannot digest that word. After your departure, they had a lively altercation, followed by a formal rupture. May it prove a lasting one!

"3d, In conclusion, mamma has just declared to me that I have a cross-grained disposition, and an atrocious character; that she gives up trying to teach me how to behave in society, which I shall never enter again but as a married woman. She avows it as her irrevocable resolution to shut me up somewhere until she finds a husband for me to her liking. And now a new idea has entered her head; she has submitted it to me. Guess

where she wishes to send me! I do not dare tell you. What an indiscretion, monsieur, to pretend to impose upon you yet again the care of my foolish head and my foolish person! It is already too much for you to have deigned to make this journey to Florence for the purpose of delivering me from a Kalmuc. And so I have rebelled, protested, represented to mamma the extravagance of her idea, told her that you could not endure us, my faults and me; that it would be in the highest degree disagreeable to you to receive me again into your house; and that I defied her to make you consent to it. She coldly replied to me, 'We shall see about that;' and I perceived a little later, that in my ardent zeal I had just been guilty of a great piece of stupidity; that all my objections had an effect contrary to what I had designed. Angry as she is with you (I still do not know why), she will be charmed to do any thing which displeases you, and you are about to be forced to submit to a formidable assault. Repair my foolish blunder as well as you can; may you at least prefer to regard it in the light of that true philosophy, which from an elevated bridge sees its misfortunes flow on like the waters of a river. The water will not flow very long, and your bridge is perched so high!

"4th, 5th, and 6th, I respect you with all my heart, monsieur; and, for the sake of this worthy sentiment, I implore you to pardon all my faults, past and future."

Raymond experienced a sudden shock in reading this letter, and in learning the very rash and unexpected resolution Lady Rovel had formed. His surprise was accompanied by a dilation of the heart, by a shiver of joy such as comes over a man to whom it is suddenly announced that he has just won a prize in the lottery. He would have very much liked to persuade himself that Miss Rovel's guardian only thought of the interest of his ward, and that, if he rejoiced in the thought of taking her back to The Hermitage, it was because he was happy —

De dérober cette rose naissante

Au souffle empoisonné d'un monde dangereux.

He tried not to deceive himself; for some hours, he had been no longer able to make an illusion of his true sentiments. Certain words unexpectedly pronounced, burned like a torch; they lighted the most obscure recesses of a soul which hid itself from itself. A magician expert in his art, with brutal hand rending away every veil, had revealed to Raymond himself. He had seen the depths of his soul, and he could no longer doubt that he very much resembled the gardener's dog, who

has never been considered the happiest of dogs. He actually felt that happiness would be a torture, but tortures have their delights.

Noon struck, and he hastily broke away from his reflections, and hastened to the rendezvous, determined to make a fine defence, but reckoning in advance upon defeat. He found Lady Rovel in the same *salon* as at their first meeting, seated upon the same sofa; she held in her lap Mirette, who had not entirely recovered from her last night's experiences.

Seeing Raymond while yet a long distance off, she asked, "Monsieur, do you really leave to-day for Geneva by the four-o'clock train?"

"It is possible, madame, but I know nothing of it."

"The nights are still cold," resumed she, "and Meg is imprudent. You will see that Pamela takes the best possible care of her, and wraps the child comfortably in her furs."

"Is Miss Rovel also going to Geneva?"

"She is to pass a few weeks at The Hermitage," responded Lady Rovel in a tone of superb nonchalance, "just the time I shall require to find her a husband. It delights me to learn, that, so far as boarding-schools are concerned, she prefers a known *ennui* to unknown evils."

"You overwhelm me, madame! But, I pray you, have you as a preliminary consulted the owner of The Hermitage? Perhaps he might think you had a somewhat cavalier fashion of disposing of him and of his house."

She gave the pug-dog a bonbon; and while the pet was cracking it with her fine teeth, the mistress replied, "Monsieur, do you, or do you not, consider yourself Meg's guardian? If you are not, by what right do you intermeddle in her affairs, and give me advice no one has asked of you? If you are, can you with a good grace refuse to harbor her at your house until I have provided for her future? — Is this reasoning not just, my child?" she said to the dog, giving her a second bonbon.

"Grant that I am her guardian," replied Raymond: "I have the burdens if not the office; but you yourself complain that Meg is difficult to guard. I take it for granted that I do not pledge myself to guard her better than you."

"I love to think that you will do your best. I have always preferred knaves to idle people. A man who respects himself should harness himself to something, to a *danseuse*, to a duty; it matters not what. You have no *danseuse*: it gives me great pleasure to provide you with a duty."

"I am confounded at your goodness, madame; but I repeat to you, that, let come what will, your daughter must hold

surveillance over herself; that I cannot be responsible to you for her conduct."

"That is self-evident; you need not say it," responded she with an accent of supreme disdain: "it is Mlle. Ferray who will be responsible to me."

"My sister is near-sighted and lame, and I declare to you that she is still less disposed than myself to take Miss Rovel again under her control."

"Do you think so?"

"I am certain of it."

"Poor, ignorant man that you are! I have passed the whole morning conversing by telegraph with Mlle. Ferray. First response from Geneva, 'Yes, madame, immediately, if my brother is willing.' Second despatch from Florence, 'Mademoiselle, your brother is willing; Meg will leave with him at four o'clock; come to Susa to meet them.' Second response from Geneva, 'Madame, in an hour I shall leave for Susa.' Now, here is a business affair according to rule, I think."

He rose. "Since my sister is on the way," said he, "I see myself forced to submit; but I reserve for myself the office of attorney. The day when I have cause of complaint against Miss Rovel, I shall send her back to you, madame, if not by telegraph, at least by rail."

"You mean to say that you will be so obliging as to keep her until I pray you to send her back to me," replied she; "that will not be long." Then with an ironical smile she added, "Learn, monsieur, from a woman who has had much converse with mankind, that in this world one must be either granite or india-rubber, and that nothing is more ridiculous than false granite."

After this beautiful apostrophe, she wished him a happy journey, gave him a new injunction to keep Meg from draughts of air; and, pulling the tip of Mirette's ear, she said, "Little one, gaze well at this gentleman, whom you will never see again."

"She is right, india-rubber or granite!" said Raymond to himself as he descended the grand marble staircase of the palazzo. And elevating his head, and hurling a glance of defiance at an invisible enemy, he formed the firm resolution to prove to himself that nature had made him of true granite, and that his will was not at the mercy of transitory emotions. He swore that he would render himself master of his thoughts, that he would come forth conqueror from trial, that Meg should never suspect the unworthy weaknesses she inspired in him, that she should never guess what passed in his soul when he gazed upon her. He swore by the bronze Perseus of Benvenuto Cellini, at which he gazed in the Loggia de Lonzi as he passed the Grand

Ducal Square; and as he recalled those singular words which are graven upon the pedestal of this noble statue, *Te, fili, si quis læserit, uller ero*, his pride, challenging his heart, repeated to him, "O my son, if any one wounds thee, I will avenge thee!"

Before half-past three, Raymond was at the station. He awaited some time that which his eyes and his heart sought; fearing lest Lady Rovel had changed her mind, a fever took possession of him. Finally Meg arrived, followed by her baggage, by Pamela, and an old steward whom Lady Rovel had charged to assist her in her preparations for departure, and to see her safely in the cars. So long as he was present, Meg had a sombre glance, an elongated visage. Scarce had he taken leave of her, as the train started, when the fog cleared away, and merriment sparkled from her eyes. For his part, Raymond felt his soul at rest. The trial he was about to confront seemed to him less difficult, less perilous, than he had at first thought. We sometimes take for the tranquillity of a satisfied mind the secret blossoming of a great joy.

Meg had a mind so serene, so gay, she appeared so resigned to her lot, so disposed to take in good part all the incidents of the journey, that it was impossible to suppose she had left her heart on the banks of the Arno; and Raymond, who regarded her stealthily, was soon free from all his remaining disquietudes. What likelihood was there that Prince Natti had better succeeded than Mr. Gordon in inspiring a serious sentiment in this joyous girl? There was no shadow upon her face: you saw there a soul free from every sorrow, as from every remembrance; a heart which had not even a regret for its amusements, certain of finding everywhere enough in store for her.

When evening came, Raymond was less content, and the night appeared long to him. Meg, after being wrapped in her furs, slept without awaking until morning. Pamela tried to follow her example, but sleep fled from her dusky eyelids. She was tormented by chagrins, she cursed the destiny which condemned her to bury anew her ebony charms in the solitude and the deadly monotony of The Hermitage. She had lived for six months in search of an adventure. Lady Rovel gave Pamela her dresses when she got tired of them; and Pamela had always flattered herself that in like manner, one day or another, Meg would pass over into her hands the heart of some gallant, for which she had no further use. She recalled to mind that a brilliant cavalier had said to her near a certain Carthusian cloister, "Charming brunette, if I lose my suit with your mistress, it is you whom I shall choose to console me." Her

charitable soul was in despair at the thought, that, in the sombre isolation of The Hermitage, she would meet no fine-looking young man to whom she could offer consolation. If she sometimes succeeded in going to sleep, beginning to dream of the beautiful mustaches of Prince Natti, she would awaken with a start, and heave a deep sigh.

Raymond could not sigh, but he experienced a cruel restlessness, a painful and feverish anxiety. He dreamed, in spite of himself, of the false Merlin, of his oracles, a whimsical admixture of truth and error. This magician or this jealous man must be very much mistaken about Meg. Who could suppose her to have any deeper feeling than friendship for her guardian? In his conversations with her since their departure from Florence, she had given proof of a perfect freedom of mind; and the ease of her manners, the naturalness and frankness of her language, bore small resemblance to the timidity and caution of a love which seeks concealment. If Meg had loved neither Prince Natti nor Mr. Gordon, it was because her heart was not yet mature, and the moment of loving had not come for her. Without contradiction, she was very happy, so happy, that, when this thought recurred to Raymond, he felt almost suffocated for lack of air, and more than once he lowered a window of the railway-carriage to bare his glowing forehead to the freshness of the night.

The car was too narrow, Meg was too near him; gazing at her from the corner of his eye, he surprised himself, cursing the profound tranquillity of her slumber, regretting bitterly, that the false Merlin was only a half-lucid somnambulist, and that, having seen so clearly upon one point, he had so grossly deceived himself upon the others.

He was charmed to see the dawn appear, making the cock crow, and driving away the nightmare; more charmed still in seeing at the Susa railway-station a limping and blinking little woman, who was impatiently awaiting the train. Hearing herself called by name, she precipitated herself boldly into the arms of a policeman whom she took for her brother. At the same instant, Meg darting behind her, and seizing her by the two shoulders, cried out, "Ah, Miss Agatha, how much sense you have in your blunders!"

Mlle. Ferray sought to turn around so as to see her; and at hap-hazard, she might have said to her as the Count de Roucè said to Mlle. d'Arpajon, his betrothed, "Mademoiselle, although you are ugly, I shall not cease to love you dearly." Then, succeeding in obtaining a nearer view, he says charitably, "Who pretended that this little girl was ugly?" Then regarding her yet more closely, he added, "Oh

the villanous liar! She is more beautiful than an angel."

"For shame, mademoiselle!" responded Meg. "They speak no more of her beauty to a sainted maiden who renounces the world." Having said this she threw herself upon Mlle. Ferray's neck, and, giving a side-glance to Raymond, she asked, "Would you like to know how Monsieur Ferray has passed his time in Florence? Would you believe that he went to a ball disguised as a Bedouin, that he received there ardent declarations, and that he took it upon himself to have a brush with a bully who stole a ribbon from me? That is gallantry, or I do not understand the word."

This bantering, and Meg's careless tone, ruffled Raymond, who did not know how to conceal his displeasure. For some minutes he had a cold, constrained air, and replied roughly enough to the caresses which his sister lavished upon him. This disturbed Mlle. Ferray's joy. She feared that he was angry with himself for having too easily yielded to the overtures of Lady Rovel; and she revolved around him like a poodle-dog which has a peccadillo upon its conscience, and by the tenderness of its glances seeks to avert the resentment of its master.

He at length became good natured. His icy reserve melted, and Mlle. Ferray's happiness shone resplendent like a July heaven. As soon as they had re-entered the railway-carriage, she began to question Meg in regard to her misdeeds, praying her to draw up the whole list. Meg recounted her enormities, and Mlle. Ferray cried out in indignation; but, perceiving that Meg was imposing upon her, she said, "You naughty girl, you are making sport of me. The only unpardonable crime is to amuse yourself at the expense of people who love you; it is the real sin against the Holy Ghost."

"Bah, mademoiselle!" responded Meg. "If the good God resembles you, there will be no last judgment; after profound consideration, the dear God will say, 'Let us embrace each other; all is explained.'"

In the evening they arrived at The Hermitage. The next day morning, Raymond, standing at a window, perceived Miss Rovel, who hooded in a tartan, her feet in the dew, was making the tour of the enclosure, examining all, assuring herself that nothing had changed either in the place or its outward appearance. She beat the bush like a hunter, and made the old remembrances come forth. Although spring was less advanced than at Florence, she found along the hedges some primroses of which she made a bouquet. Then, retracing her steps, she visited the hen-house, throwing a glance into the stable and the hay-lofts. She was about re-entering the house, when

Raymond hailed her. "Miss Rovel," cried he, "historians recount, that, the first time the exiled Napoleon took a walk around his island, he exclaimed, 'The devil! my prison is small.'"

"I have eyes that magnify," responded she, "and so good a heart that I wish Hudson Lowe to flourish." And she threw her bouquet into his face.

For more than three weeks the days flew peacefully at The Hermitage, its inmates reckoning no other events than their thoughts. Those of Miss Rovel were as tranquil as agreeable. It seemed as if, in obedience to some charm, her blood flowed less quickly, that some grains of lead had entered her brain. Her days passed in a round of amusements without giddiness, in long rests without languor. They feared lest time might hang heavily on her hands, and proposed to her promenades, concerts, and theatres; she replied that she needed rest and calm, that an orchard circled by blossoming hedges, and bounded by a brook, sufficed as a promenade for her limbs and for her mind. Raymond presented her a horse. She was sensible of this attention, and rode out once or twice through gratitude. But her greatest pleasures were to remain in the house, to work, for better or worse, upon Mlle. Ferray's tapestry, and at evening to listen to some tragedy which her guardian read to her in a voice grave enough, but more emotional than of yore.

She moreover secured occupation for herself by asking Mlle. Ferray to resign the duties of mistress of the house in her favor; and she made great efforts to prove that she understood how to conduct a house as well as anybody. Her administration gave much cause for criticism. It often happened, that she mislaid the keys, and lost much time in searching for them; that, something diverting her mind from the search, she would forget all about it, and end by going to inquire for the keys of Mlle. Ferray. A duck having hatched out some eggs, she boasted of having particular knowledge as to the rearing of ducklings; and so adroitly did she set about the work, that twenty-four hours sufficed to exterminate the entire brood. She made a whole tribe of rabbits pass from life to death by feeding them with soaked grass. Her presumption knew no bounds; she represented herself as a clever cook of the first order, and prepared with her own hands a dish of her own invention, which Raymond frankly declared execrable. Mlle. Ferray confessed that it was not exquisite; but upon mature reflection she succeeded in explaining the reason, and pronounced it eatable.

These small errors had no fatal results; the house was not in jeopardy in the

hands of Miss Rovel; she set fire neither to the cellar nor the hay-loft; and, aside from the rabbits and the ducks, her cooking poisoned no one. And thus did this romantic girl appear to have fore-sworn romance forever, and to be determined to seek happiness in a practical life. She might have been called a traveler, who, undeceived as to the hazardous paths where caprice had drawn her, as to the sombre and involved forests where she had been stumbling, as to the marshes where *ignes fatui* dance, with gladdened eyes contemplates the direct, only route she has just regained, and which once her fancies had disdained.

Mlle. Ferray was secretly troubled at this great wisdom, which seemed excessive to her. Meg appeared too different from her own self. She regretted her former transports, her stormy humors, the sallies of her froward pride. She could almost have implored Meg to insult her in some way; for she complained of people she loved when they deprived her of the pleasure of pardoning something in them. If Meg was too perfect in Mlle. Ferray's judgment, in Raymond's opinion she was too happy: his sick heart reproached her for being so well. As for the rest, he treated his disease brutally, carefully shunned every opportunity for a *tête-à-tête* with Miss Rovel, saw her only at table or in his sister's presence, and played his rôle of guardian with irreproachable probity. Miss Rovel, on her part, was an exemplary ward, and in her conduct studied to conciliate deference with allowed familiarity.

CHAPTER XI.

ONE afternoon she went to walk in the wood. She held in her hand a volume of Mme. de Sévigné; this reading pleased her. By a little study, and through her conversations with Raymond, she had acquired enough literature to be able to perceive the consummate art hidden under the apparent nonchalance of this divine pen, and to appreciate the most charming form in which reason has ever invested itself, although, to tell the truth, Mme. de Sévigné was a little too reasonable for her; the folly of loving her daughter desperately appeared to her insufficient to fill the void of time. To-day she had met in a letter dated March 9, 1692, a passage which had particularly impressed her. She was about reading it for the third time, when, lifting her eyes from her book, she perceived, some steps before her, her guardian seated on the trunk of an overthrown tree. His head lowered, his arms swinging, he gazed at the running water; he had a contracted face, a melancholy expression shadowed

his features. His meditation was so profound that he was not aware of the enemy's approach. Meg stopped, then she stirred up with her foot a mass of dead leaves. Now he turned his head, and grew pale. She did not seem to remark his agitation; having gracefully approached, she sat down at his side, and prayed him to explain to her some allusions of Mme. de Sévigné's which she did not understand. He explained who Mme. de Pomponne was, and what were the philosophical principles of a certain Descartes, which the beautiful mother of Madelonne wished to know like the game of *hombre*, not to play, but to see it played. She listened naïvely, fixing upon his face her large eyes, attentive, innocent, thoughtful, like a good little girl who wishes to profit, and to gain instruction.

When he had told her all, she led him away. Upon arriving at a little crossing whence two paths branched off, Raymond wished to take that which led up to the house; perhaps he had a presentiment of what awaited him. Miss Rovel obliged him to keep on in the path along the brook. He again took up Descartes, discoursing persistently upon him. She lent him her two ears; but as they reached a place where the forest began to grow less dense, casting her eyes around her, and suddenly leaving Raymond's arm, she cried,—

"Ah, monsieur, what a remembrance! This deep water where I did not drown myself, this ash-tree where I concealed myself, and you here, at the foot of the tree, your hands clenched firmly, your teeth set— Ah, yes! Good heavens, what a remembrance!"

He did not appear to listen, and, raising his eyes to two magpies that were jabbering and chattering at the summit of a poplar, he said, "What an odious uproar! Who do these birds belong to?"

"Who can know that?" replied she; "but confess now, that you were furious!"

His nose still in the air, he said, "I never did hear magpies chatter in this way!"

"It is their trade," answered she; "all people who have voices like to make them heard; but have you never asked yourself why I made a feint of drowning myself?"

"Do you ask me that, Miss Rovel? Ah! it is a problem very easy to solve: you wanted the pleasure of making me take a cold bath."

"You were not present. It is of history as ancient as yesterday that we cannot speak. Imagine that I was then romantic and foolish, and that from the time of your encounter with M. de Boisgenêt you had been my Amadis."

"Your words are very true," interrupted he; "these magpies have the devil in them; all this must be about some great household quarrel."

"Hadn't we better climb the tree at once, to reconcile them?" asked Meg. "I tell you that at this time— Would you believe that one evening I was amusing myself in cutting up strips of paper upon which I had written, turning away my head, 'Miss Rovel is stupidly in love with M. Raymond Ferray.' When I gazed at what I had written, it seemed to me that the paper was a wretch who had discovered my secret, and kept repeating it to me in a loud voice, and, red with embarrassment, I burned it in my candle. Ah, monsieur! It is not all to love: one would be assured that one is loved in return. Then I made a feint of drowning myself, saying to myself, 'When he finds me living, he will fall at my feet, exclaiming, "If you were dead, should I be able to survive you?"' Alas! you know what happened. That was a very cruel moment to me; for I repeat it, you were my Amadis."

Raymond made a violent effort at self-mastery, and succeeded in remarking calmly enough, "You would not to-day be tempted to subject me to such a proof."

"No, certainly not," said Meg, with an air of good-fellowship. "I have become reasonable; I content myself with having a great friendship for you, and I am as sure of your friendship as you are of mine, mutual respect being our safeguard."

"Do not doubt it," replied he with the weary air of a man to whose neck a millstone is attached.

In her turn, she lifted her eyes toward the two birds who were scolding most beautifully, and said, "What are you saying of a household quarrel? It is a coquettish scene, and up there as down here, each plays his *rôle*. But I pray you, monsieur," continued she, "see how easy it is to find fault with these around you when the desire possesses you, and to give false colors to the most innocent things. What would prevent a malicious or a jealous man, Prince Natti or Mr. Gordon for example, from pretending that Miss Rovel, after having cursed her guardian, after having forsaken him, after having sworn to forget him, having met in the vast world no man who is his equal, took it into her head one morning to invent a pretext for drawing him to Florence, and that she wove some days later a little complot to oblige him to take her back to The Hermitage? This might very well be sustained, and behold how deceitful are appearances, and upon what reputations hang!"

At these words, seized by a sudden im-

pulse, she exclaimed, "Heavens! the beautiful craw-fish!" and, extending her arms toward the brook, she darted up the hill with so impetuous a movement, that Raymond, fearing doubtless lest she might fall, held with his left hand to the knot of her girdle, while his right, resting upon her shoulder, touched lightly her neck and her chin. Prodigiouslly absorbed as she was in her crustacea, so much so that Raymond could not succeed in retaining her, Miss Rovel did not fail to prove that this hand was hot, trembling, palpitating; and in her agitation she seemed to consult with herself as to what had happened to her, and what she was about to do.

At the same instant, Raymond heard some one call him. He let go his hold, recoiled some steps, and replied in an insecure voice, "Who wants me? I am here." Mlle. Ferray appeared; she came to tell her brother that his gardener wished instructions from him. Raymond immediately started for the house upon the run, as if he were making his escape, leaving his sister with Miss Rovel, who spoke brusquely to her, and, under the first pretence that offered, almost committed that freak the good lady was expecting from day to day, and which charmed her like a reminiscence of the past.

After having given his orders to the gardener, Raymond left The Hermitage for a walk. He had need of solitude to calm his heated brain, to restore a little order to his thoughts and resolutions. The walk did him good. He did not return home until nearly dusk. To regain his chamber he had to pass through the library; he entered, and perceived Miss Rovel in the embrasure of a window; she had fallen asleep in her chair. She had gone there to take back the volume of *Mme. de Sévigné*, which she had finished reading; but, when about to place it back upon the shelf, she had wished to read again the passage which had so vividly impressed her in the forest. In re-reading it, sleep had overpowered her; and this certainly was the first time *Mme. de Sévigné* ever made any one go to sleep.

Raymond foresaw a danger more redoubtable than that he had run on the borders of the brook, and he wished to beat a retreat. We cannot do all we wish; an instant after, he was not more than two steps from the charming sleeper. Her head was slightly lifted, the lips gently parted by a half smile; her hair was unbound, and rolled over her breast and shoulders its beautiful silken waves. The volume remained open upon her knees. Drawing near on tiptoe, Raymond seized it, and read as follows:—

"You demand of me the symptoms of

this love. It is, first of all, a living and all-absorbing negative; it is an exaggerated indifference which proves the contrary; it is a suspension of every movement of this round machine, the world; it is a relaxation from all ordinary cares, to apply yourself to one alone; it is a perpetual satire against people in love. 'Truly, one must be very insane, very foolish,' you say. 'What a young woman!' And to this we reply inwardly, 'Ah, yes! all this is true;' but you do not cease to be in love; you express your reflections; they are just, they are true, they are your torment, but you do not cease being in love; you are full of reason, but love is stronger than all reasoning; you are ill, you weep, you are angry, and you are in love."

The book fell from his hands that were trembling from emotion and resentment. Yet once again he made a movement to retire; and, as by an irresistible force, his feet led him toward the chair where Miss Rovel continued her peaceful slumber. With an ardent glance, he contemplated the delightful disorder of her hair, and a tremor ran through all his veins. He seized one of the gilded locks, and rubbed it between his fingers; Miss Rovel did not awake. Then he inclined slowly toward her, as if to drink in her breath and her life; she did not stir. The demon which possessed him was stronger than he; his senses forsook him; he imprinted a glowing kiss upon those smiling lips, which he thought he felt quiver under his.

At that very instant he darted back to the wall, full of confusion, horrified at what he had just done. Miss Rovel started, passed her hand over her forehead, opened her eyes, contemplating him with an astonished air. "Ah! is it you, monsieur?" she asked. "I really thought I was asleep."

He fixed upon her his affrighted eyes; it seemed to him as if his knees, stealing away from him, were about to precipitate themselves at the feet of this dishevelled blonde, as if his lips were already moving to declare his trespass, as if his soul were escaping him. He recalled to mind the device which Benvenuto Cellini has inscribed upon the pedestal of his *Perseus*, and which he had recited half aloud in traversing the Grand Ducal Square. His pride, coming to the aid of his heart in its extremity, cried out to him, "My son, if any one wound thee, I will avenge thee." And he succeeded in remaining upright.

He said to himself, "Who are you? Is this really you? Have you forgotten your past and even your name? What has become of your disdains and your resentments, your character and your will? Is it possible that a man like you

is at the mercy of a curl of golden hair and a smiling mouth? If you speak a word, if your knees yield, all is ended. You will no more belong to yourself, you will have surrendered yourself utterly, — and to whom? To a precocious coquette, who knows not, who will never know, how to love, and who will make it her glory to have wrested from you an avowal over which she will triumph to-day, at which she will laugh to-morrow. And if, through some impossibility, she should love you as you love her, what can you hope? What have you not to fear? How long would your happiness endure? A few days, a few weeks at most, and you would expiate this intoxication by remorse, disquietudes, distrust; by incurable suspicions, by atrocious jealousies, by all those refined torments whose secret woman has, and by the insupportable ignominy of an eternal servitude."

While he was thus talking to himself, Meg said to him, "Ah, well, monsieur, what are you gazing at in me? Is there anything extraordinary about me?"

He had not yet strength to reply; but he drew himself up, and breathed more freely; he felt that he was saved.

"There! what is going to happen now?" resumed she, adjusting her hair.

He finally recovered speech, and said to her in a gentle but firm voice, "Nothing is going to happen: re-assure yourself. I have been waiting until you were fully awake to announce a piece of news to you. I have made up my mind to depart upon a long journey."

She sprang excitedly to her feet. "Indeed, that is a piece of news! And may I ask what motive" —

"A work," replied he, "an important work, which I have of late resumed. I am going to make some researches in the libraries of Paris, London, and Berlin."

She became red as glowing coals, her eyes flashed, she bit her lips. "Have you made known your resolution to Mlle. Ferray?" she asked.

"No: I have only just formed it; and it has cost me much. You know how domestic I am," he added hurriedly.

She picked up the volume that lay on the floor, placed it upon its proper shelf, and took down the next volume of the series. Her hands trembled, but her voice was steady and self-possessed, when, turning again to him, she asked, "How soon do you leave?"

He was about to say "To-morrow," but it was impossible for him to pronounce the word, and he accorded himself the favor of a delay. "Within ten days," he replied.

She gazed at him steadily; he bravely sustained the fire. "I hope, monsieur, that you will write to me sometimes."

"Can you doubt it?" cried he. "Do you not know that my thoughts, my remembrances" — He stopped short; then, recollecting himself, he succeeded in saying with an affected smile, "Miss Rovel, a guardian like me cannot forget a ward like you."

And, having bidden her good afternoon, he took refuge in his chamber, while she went to hers. Half an hour later, they met again in the dining-room. In the midst of the dinner, Raymond communicated his project to his sister. She gazed at him in open-mouthed wonder, and obliged him to repeat the words. She glanced alternately at him and Meg, as if to read in the eyes of both a response to the questions she asked herself. Was she to take this astonishing piece of news in good or ill part? Was this journey a wretched caprice, or the symptom of a complete cure? Did Raymond desire to quit The Hermitage because the presence of Miss Rovel placed a restraint upon his melancholy? or must she believe that, renouncing his past, he had decided to re-enter active life, and to see the world again? He relieved her anxiety by saying almost gayly, "What would you have, my dear? It is all your fault. My journey to Florence has revived my wandering propensities. There is within me a thirst for travel, which will perhaps lead me to the end of the world."

"But you promise us to return?"

"Assuredly," said he, and proceeded to speak of other things.

He remained for some time in the parlor, assuming an easy and natural air. When he felt that he had sufficiently borne his cross, he pressed his sister's hand, bowed politely to Miss Rovel, and went up to his own rooms.

After he had withdrawn, Meg paced up and down the parlor, with lowering glance, flaming cheeks, and a stormy brow; then taking a seat opposite Mlle. Ferray, who was knitting mittens for an old woman of the neighborhood, she said in a sarcastic tone, "Do you know, mademoiselle, why M. Ferray will leave in ten days for a long journey?"

"He has himself explained, my dear child," responded Mlle. Ferray. "My wish is fulfilled; he has resumed his taste for Arabic, and his work demands important researches."

"Arabic is the least of his cares," replied Meg with a shrug of the shoulders. "A truce to this nonsense! What credulity you have! Perhaps I am not polite: one learns not to be in this house, such things go on here. But in a word, mademoiselle, would you like to know why your brother and my guardian have decided to start out and run over the world? Shall I tell you? Will you listen to me? It is because your brother and my guardian

are desperately in love with Miss Rovel."

At this strange piece of intelligence, Mlle. Ferray dropped three stitches, and let her knitting-work fall upon her knees. "Have you lost your senses, Meg?" she cried. "What means this monstrous invention? Whence do you assume that my brother—that your guardian"—

"But it must be so since it is so. Here is the proof. Suspicions had come to me, and I wished to have my mind clear. I had just reached the library, when I heard M. Ferray's step in the corridor. I threw myself upon a chair in the most graceful and romantic attitude I could think of, and I feigned to be sound asleep. He entered, drew back, approached, revolved around me like a cat around a cheese. Then at last plucking up courage, for shame, Miss Agatha! he imprinted a loving kiss upon my mouth; and I assure you the kissing was well done."

"Am I to believe you, or not?" asked Mlle. Ferray. "And then you opened your eyes?"

"You will confess that the least I could do was to awaken. Heavens! what a comical air he had!—the air of a thief who has just been surprised with his hand in the sack. If I am not deceived, he straightway gave himself up to a profound deliberation, which lasted about an age. I have discovered, that, in adjusting his little affairs of conscience, M. Ferray adopts the system of the two houses. His House of Commons voted that he throw himself upon his knees, and make me a formal declaration; but the House of Lords—you see from here those majestic, hammer-headed old men—exhorted him not to compromise his precious dignity; and the Lords had the final word. It is through their counsel that he has conjured up this idea of telling us he has business in Paris; and in a week he is going to run away."

To Mlle. Ferray, this recital seemed most extraordinary, most incredible, more preposterous than all the stories of the Blue Library. If they had come to announce to her that the Emperor of China had fallen in love with herself, and had sent to demand her hand in marriage, she would have been less surprised; and yet Meg was so lucid, so persistent in her affirmations, that at last she believed her. And moreover, since Mlle. Ferray had learned that her brother had been at a mask-ball, she had decided that all is possible.

For some time she maintained a profound silence; then after many prologues, preambles, prefaces, introductions, after an array of periphrases and circumlocutions, changing color at every word, after re-adjusting her head-dress, and scratch-

ing her forehead with her knitting-needle, she plucked up courage to propound a question to Meg, which was designed to ascertain if she allowed herself to admit, that, some day or other, one could reasonably suppose—

She did not reach the end of her question; scarce one feeble ray of light had come to illumine the idea she would feign express, when it plunged back into the darkness.

"Your questions are not clear," replied Meg with a smile which was not amiable; "but I think I divine that you would perhaps like to know if it is allowable to admit that some day the passion of M. Ferray for his ward might meet a return. To speak frankly with you, I have some friendship for him, but not a bit of love. How could I love him? There is between us such a difference in age, in character, in opinions, in tastes! You might shut us up, him and me, in a cage; and, by day after to-morrow, one would have eaten the other!"

"Good heavens! I do not say but that if, after the little liberty he had been taking with me, he had thrown himself at my feet to implore my pardon, to declare his passion for me, if he had cried out with great ardor and in a fine accent, 'Miss Rovel, I love you, I adore you!' perhaps my heart might have been moved; perhaps, in the course of time—But I tell you, Miss Agatha, your brother and my guardian have too much pride; and, when one has a great deal of pride, one does not know how to love; and I am so constituted that it would be impossible for me to love a man who did not love me as I wish to be loved. Every one has his or her fantasy. This is mine."

Mlle. Ferray undertook to defend her brother, and made great effort to demonstrate to Meg that she took for haughtiness, the scruples of an exaggerated delicacy, and a too sensitive feeling of honor. Meg's only response was a shake of the head, while with her pretty cat-like nails she poutingly unravelled the fringe of her girdle. Finally, interrupting Mlle. Ferray, she said,—

"If you should argue until to-morrow you could not prevent M. Ferray being a haughty, arrogant man, and arrogant men are not to my taste. Since his pride is his supreme good and his adored mistress, let him form projects to show her the world; let him take her to Paris, to London, to Peking, and may God bless their pilgrimage!"

Mlle. Ferray relapsed into silence; she seemed to be in deep reflection. At last she said with a sigh, "My brother is right, Meg; he does well to depart. I even regret that he cannot depart to-morrow; but I have one prayer to address to you. I demand it of you as a favor, not

to let him suspect that you have surprised his secret."

"Re-assure yourself," answered Meg, in a tone of the deepest irony. "I am more generous than you think; I have pity for this great misfortune, and this disastrous shipwreck of an illustrious wisdom which believed itself secure from all hazards. It shall never be said, that these two eyes you see here have witnessed it."

With these words, Miss Rovel rose, coldly embraced Mlle. Ferray, and, humming a tune, ascended the staircase leading to her chamber. She found Pamela in the vestibule, her eyes heavy with sleep, her head wabbling to and fro. She was waiting to assist her mistress in her toilet for the night. Meg shook her off, saying, "Eternal sleeper, were you dreaming of a prince, a duke, or a marquis?"

"Ah, mademoiselle," replied the negress, "what can one do better than sleep or dream in this lugubrious house, which reeks with *ennui*? I am a dead woman if I remain here a month longer."

"Triple simpleton that you are!" returned Meg; "who asks you to remain here? Since you love change and adventure, you shall soon have enough of them to satisfy you; I promise you that!"

And, pinching Pamela's arm with such vehemence as to wrest from her a cry of pain, Miss Rovel added, "Learn that I am angry, and that in my anger I am capable of all."

XII.

MLLE. FERRAY lay awake a large portion of the night meditating upon the strange recital Miss Rovel had made to her. Never did mathematician more persistently turn and re-turn a complicated problem in his head, never apply to its solution more transcendent powers of analysis, than Mlle. Ferray employed in seeking some clew to this mysterious and unparalleled event. A woman of her character required little time to reconcile her mind to an occurrence which at the first moment seemed incredible to her. Going on from syllogism to syllogism, she arrived at the conclusion that the event which had at first appeared a misfortune was one of the happiest of providential dispensations.

La Fontaine has said that lame people hate home. Mlle. Ferray did not hate home at all, for the reason, that, without change of place, she journeyed to her heart's content. Her imagination galloped so fast, that events could hardly catch up with it, and her dreams were rose colored from habit. After her well-known indulgence had explained every thing, her optimism assumed the task of arranging every thing. She arranged

matters so well, that to-night, while she slept, in the space of one revolving year Raymond had married Meg, and from the marriage had been born a superb infant, with the tawny complexion of its father, and the blonde hair of its mother.

In our night-dreams all is easy, all yields, all bends; but when day arrives we perceive to our cost, that walls are impenetrable, that barriers of iron do not yield like reeds; that tiles are heavy, and it is painful to receive one of them on your head; that, so far as mind and matter are concerned, it is the fundamental property of all mundane things to resist our fantasies. When Mlle. Ferray rose from her bed, she had the chagrin of experiencing the inexorable resistances of life.

As soon as she had made her morning toilet, availing herself of the first pretext that occurred to her mind, she went to her brother's apartments, resolved to compel him within his intrenchments to demonstrate to her that all could be arranged. She found him so calm, so smiling, so gently resolute, he explained to her in so deliberate a manner the desire he had to see Paris again, and the profit he expected to derive from his journey, that she was entirely disconcerted.

But she felt that she must strike one decisive blow; and, to put him to the proof, she declared that she had apprehensions as to remaining alone at The Hermitage with Miss Rovel. How was she to control those exuberant spirits? or, in an extreme case, how was she to subdue the rebellion of this child, who was no longer a child? Raymond replied to his sister, that her fears had slight foundation, that Meg was too much attached to her to cause her grave anxieties; but he assured her, that, if any thing especial occurred, she had only to inform him, and he would hasten home immediately.

Still Mlle. Ferray persisted in stating her apprehensions. "Since it is my duty to tell you all, my good brother," said she, "I am going to mention to you an incident of which I have not spoken for fear of disquieting you. Since Meg's return to The Hermitage, she has received two letters from Florence, and they came at an interval of only two days. I saw the address, and it did not appear to me to be written by a woman's hand. I questioned her upon the subject, but could not draw from her the least explanation."

He reflected a moment; then he replied with perfect composure, "Do not give yourself the least uneasiness; it is evident that these letters come from Lady Rovel, who is in the habit of taking for her secretary the first paper-scratcher who comes to hand; or they may have been

written by M. de Boisgenêt or by any other of the numerous adorers Miss Rovel had harnessed to her car, all of whom must have been thrown into consternation by her sudden departure. But this matters little; no harm will result from the correspondence. If Miss Rovel had cherished any serious attachment in Florence, we should have been obliged to put thumb-screws upon her to bring her back to The Hermitage; that is as self-evident as an axiom of geometry. I am convinced, that, although her time is hastening on, the hour of serious passion has not struck for this little girl. She sports with life and with people like a kitten with its shadow. And then she possesses a foundation of good sense and of sound judgment which ought to re-assure us."

All this was said so calmly, so naturally, that Mlle. Ferray began to suspect Meg of having related idle tales to divert herself, and to hoax the anxious, credulous sister of her guardian. She did not suspect that Raymond's serenity arose from great strength of mind and an almost perfect self-control; that, as soon as she left him, he remained immovable, his face buried in his hands, and that, hearing under his window the voice and the laugh of Miss Rovel, he rose with a sudden start, pale as death, compressing so tightly between his fingers a little silver-gilt spoon with which he sanded his papers, that he broke it into two pieces.

If her brother's tranquillity astonished Mlle. Ferray, Meg's conduct gave her much to think of. For the last two days Miss Rovel had shown singular caprices, an irritable humor, a flushed complexion, abrupt, almost rude manners, forced gaiety, a lowering glance. Mlle. Ferray regarded her with perplexed eyes. If she had been assured of the ability to mend it so that the rent would not have been apparent, she would gladly have opened Meg's head to see what was inside it; perhaps she would have discovered there some sinister conspiracy, some veritable powder-plot.

One morning she went to Meg's room, resolved to try yet once more to bring her to the confessional, and, to her great surprise, found the girl conveying a portion of her linen from the bureau-drawers to a trunk. Before the good lady had a moment's time to question her, Miss Rovel complained that the drawers had a mouldy smell. Mlle. Ferray examined them carefully, and assured herself that they were in good condition. "This merely proves," said Meg coolly, "that we have not the same ideas as to dryness and humidity."

In the afternoon of the same day, a little before twilight, as Mlle. Ferray was crossing the terrace, with watering-pot in hand, she was almost overthrown

by a whirlwind bursting suddenly upon her, and crying out, "I am going to take a turn around the garden and orchard to warm my feet." At the end of half an hour, not seeing the child return, Mlle. Ferray feared that she had lingered too long in the grove or orchard, and had become chilled. She took a shawl on her arm, and started in pursuit. When she reached the border of the stream, she imagined she heard the murmur of two voices, and, an instant after, she recognized that of Meg. These words, distinctly uttered, met her ear: "Very well; I will do as you wish."

Mlle. Ferray, curious by nature, had for a few days past found good reason to be more curious than ever; but she felt an instinctive, an irresistible horror of any thing resembling treachery. Ardent as was her desire to know to whom, and to what proposal, Meg had just made this deliberate assent, instead of remaining silent so as to hear more, she at once called out "Miss Rovel!" in a loud voice. Meg answered immediately, and, running to meet her, she cried breathlessly, "You arrive in good time, mademoiselle; this man was beginning to frighten me." As she spoke these words, she seized Mlle. Ferray by the two shoulders, made her wheel around, and led her out of the grove.

"A man who could have it in his heart to frighten *you!*" said Mlle. Ferray, enveloping Meg in the shawl she carried on her arm, "who is this hero?"

"A sort of marauder, a bone-hunter, who came up on the other side of the brook, and who asked alms of me in a familiar, insolent tone; I at first refused; he made a movement as if to cross the stream, and come over to me. 'I will do as you wish,' said I to him, and threw my purse in his face."

As Mlle. Ferray, somewhat incredulous, gazed at her with questioning eyes, she added, laughing, "Do you not believe me? You are right: this good-for-nothing is a lover, who proposes to elope with me."

"Shall I tell you what most displeases me in you?" returned Mlle. Ferray. "It is, that it is impossible to know whether you jest, or speak in earnest."

"Prince Natti once made me the same reproach, when I was in Florence. Well, we are what we are; we cannot re-create ourselves."

"I do not agree with you upon that point," replied Mlle. Ferray. "I have always believed that the desire to render ourselves agreeable to those who love us, is capable of working miracles."

These words made an impression upon Meg. She seemed almost moved. "Miss Agatha," cried she, "the devil is not as black as they pretend, and I wish to

make you a promise. I do not know how many times more mamma is going to leave me here: I am aware that her great concern just now is to find a husband for me, and I am resolved not to dispute her choice, whatever it may be. But I can promise you, that so long as I remain here, and during the absence of monsieur your brother, I will be good, sweet, charming; that hereafter I will show you all the letters the post brings me."

Moved even to tears by this amiable impulse, Mlle. Ferray expressed her gratitude to Meg. "You could give me one token of friendship more precious still," she said; "be perfectly sincere, decide to open your heart to me."

"Ah! I see what you are coming at!" answered Meg. "Mademoiselle, I declare to you once for all, that the event you desire is impossible; in the first place, because I do not love M. Ferray: in the second place, because he does not love me well enough. His love is like apples too ripe on one side, too green on the other. I detest fruits badly ripened; they are rather sour, and set the teeth on edge."

Whether Mlle. Ferray's reproaches had touched her, or whether from some other cause known to herself alone, the ill wind which had for two days blown over Miss Rovel all at once subsided. Her mind seemed at rest, her nerves grew calm, her glance softened, she indulged in no more brusqueries or caprices. She showed an affectionate politeness to her guardian, questioned him with great interest as to his plans for travel, charged him to write often, and promised to reply immediately. Mlle. Ferray no longer knew what to believe: she resolved to make no further attempts to fathom the mystery, but to yield herself up to the fates with a bandage before her eyes.

Every night, at about eleven o'clock, Raymond made the tour of the house and its dependencies, to assure himself that nothing unusual was passing in his cloister, that the doors were closed, and the fires extinguished. On the evening before the day irrevocably fixed for his departure, just as he had finished his nocturnal rounds, a weakness came over him, such a weakness as only a man sure of his strength can allow himself. Miss Rovel had just gone up to her chamber. Its windows opened on the path by which Raymond had returned to the house, and Raymond imagined that he should go to sleep more easily after having seen a certain shadow flit to and fro upon the curtain.

M. Ferray looked his love in the face as a man sentenced to die, and who is to be executed on the morrow, confronts death: we can but have some indulgence for the last fantasies of the condemned. He retraced his steps, re-opened the gate

leading from the court, and halted at a portion of the fence shaded by a lime-tree. There he leaned against a post until his wish was gratified. For two minutes he gazed at a white-muslin curtain, upon which passed and repassed a graceful shadow. Soon he recognized the outlines of another shadow, more opaque, far less ethereal; and Pamela, drawing aside the curtain, opened the window, gazed an instant into the night, then closed the shutters, and all was over.

Raymond was just leaving his ambuscade, when he heard the sound of an advancing footstep. Ashamed of the infatuation which had led him to commit an act so unworthy of a philosopher and a man of honor, jealous of exposing his weakness to the whole universe, his troubled conscience feared a passer-by, and he wished to give the intruder time to leave the place.

There was no moon, the sky was veiled, and the night obscure. Raymond sounded the shadows with his glance, but discerned amid them no human form. Soon the footfall was silenced; the passer-by had halted or gone back. As, for a second time, he made a movement to leave his hiding-place, an odd incident held him immovable. After having given her attentions to her young mistress, Pamela, with lamp in hand, had gone down to her chamber, which was in the lower story. She approached the window, which was grated, lighted a wax taper, and passed it into the space between two bars, employing the entire length of her arm. Was this a signal? Was this a pharos? The pedestrian who had halted resumed his walk, and the negress soon extinguished her light. An instant after, some person brushed against the wall, and advanced to the grated window, where began a long whispering in a key by turns sharp and tender, but so low that Raymond, intently listening, could not catch a single word.

He could but felicitate himself upon this occurrence. For a long time he had been endeavoring to spy out some good and sufficient reason for discharging Pamela, whom he did not think a desirable person to have near his ward during his absence. He thanked the kind fortune that had aided him so well, and he was just going to step out and report himself, when Pamela abruptly closed the window, and the man departed in haste, making rapid strides over the path by which he had come.

In his quality of judge-advocate, proceeding to an examination, Raymond regretted that the bird had flown without allowing him time to take its description. He would not compromise his dignity by running after it, and so, drawing back a few paces, he took a path which cut

across the fields, and regained the direct route opposite a window where a lamp was lighted in moonless nights. Having arrived here, Raymond perceived, to his displeasure, that the lantern lacked oil; its light was so feeble that the man passed without allowing him an opportunity to examine his features. All he could ascertain was, that his hat was of black felt, that he was tall in stature, and had the appearance neither of a lackey nor a day-laborer.

"Why may it not be a prince?" he asked himself gayly; and he reflected that Pamela was not a vulgar soul, that man had begun for her with nothing less than a marquis, that after having won the favor of a marquis she would naturally look higher, that this African Diana aimed her arrows only at large game.

All at once, a sharp sorrow pierced his heart like a sword. It occurred to him that this night-wanderer he had surprised so near the house, might be in quest, not of a negress, but of a beautiful white girl who was Raymond Ferray's ward, that perhaps this supposed adorer of thick lips only employed them to transmit messages. He was seized with a violent tremor: it seemed to him that the lantern, suddenly relighted, gave forth a dazzling glow, and that he perceived at the end of the path a man who walked hastily, rubbing his hands, and snapping his fingers at him; he thought that the man also in a loud voice made known his name, but Raymond did not understand it. He said to himself half aloud, "Renounce her, I am capable of that; but to allow any one to steal her from me, that is too much to demand of me." And his hatred passed in review the faces of all the men of his acquaintance.

But he gradually recovered from this tremor, he combated his imagination, he tried to demonstrate to himself that his suspicions were absurd; and while thus reasoning he reached The Hermitage court, whose gate he had left open. Fate decreed that he should find another man here, but not so mysterious an individual as the one he had just seen. This man having stumbled against a post, and grazed his knee, was indulging in imprecations against ill-lighted houses. Raymond took a phosphorus match from his watch-pocket, and re-lighted the lantern before the gate. From the metallic plate which glittered on the front of his cap, he recognized in this booby an official messenger, and roughly asked him to whom he had been sent, and what he wanted. The fellow, who was the worse for wine, replied that he had been sent with a small parcel to The Hermitage, that, owing to false instructions as to the route, he had lost his way, and that since

three o'clock he had been asking it from house to house.

"And from tavern to tavern," interposed Raymond. "Where is your parcel?"

The messenger, who could scarcely stand upright, fumbled for some minutes in his pockets, and finally drew out a little box carefully enveloped in gray paper, tied with twine, and sealed. He showed the box to Raymond without handing it to him, and said, "This is for a young lady who lives here, and I was expressly charged to deliver it into her own hands."

Raymond excitedly snatched the parcel from him. What does not a troubled mind invent? A single moment had sufficed him to construct a history, complete to the minutest details. Under that gray paper he crumpled between his fingers, lay concealed a letter which they had not dared confide to the post; that letter had been written by the nocturnal promenader whose features he had not been able to distinguish, and who had come in quest of an immediate response, not suspecting that his Mercury had forgotten himself in an inn.

"Who sends you?" asked he of the messenger.

"Ah, well! If we had to know the names of all the world, mine would be a very cumbersome trade," replied he.

"Was it not a tall man in a black-felt hat?" proceeded Raymond, boiling over with impatience.

"What the deuce does that concern you?" answered the messenger; "do you wish to buy the hat of him?"

"You are a winebibber and a knave," said Raymond savagely, and closed the gate in the impudent fellow's face. Then he hastened to his chamber, placing the box on the table the moment he entered. He examined the box, the handwriting, the device on the seal; the more he gazed at it, the more suspicious became its appearance. It had, he thought, a sinister and wicked physiognomy. This tied, sealed bonbon box surely contained some deadly poison. He felt it already running through his veins, and attacking the very sources of his life.

He took the scissors, and was about to cut the cord; but as before, on the route, he began to talk with himself half aloud. "Bartholo lives still," said he, "here he is!" And he placed his finger on his forehead. He felt a transport of fury against the blonde locks which had done such violence to his character, and subjected him to so many humiliations. This sort of hatreds are only reversed loves, and the wrong side of the stuff resembles the right side so much, that we often confound the one with the other. Still it was well for Raymond

that he had evoked the guardian of Rosina, for he went to bed without having cut the cord.

The next morning, when he went down to breakfast, he had the box in his pocket. During the repast, they conversed only on trifling subjects; but at dessert Miss Rovel asked Mlle. Ferray, if there had not come for her a little parcel she was expecting from Florence.

Raymond gazed at her steadily. "Pardon my negligence," he said: "this package was handed me last night by a messenger the worse for wine; but he did not bring it from Florence, he came from Geneva, sent by an unknown man of tall stature, and wearing a black-felt hat. That is all I was able to draw from the clown."

"Whether the unknown be short or tall, whether he wears a hat or not," returned Miss Rovel merrily, "I am enchanted that his parcel arrived safe."

And, Raymond having passed her the box, she carefully examined the envelope, then she placed it near her plate, and began to drum upon the table with her knife.

In spite of himself, Raymond's eyes kept wandering over to that sinister gray paper. Miss Rovel evidently perceived this, for she said to him point blank, "How much reason you have to deride women, monsieur, they are so curious! Just look at Mlle. Ferray! She is tortured by a desire to know what is inside this gray paper. Shall I give her that satisfaction? Inside this paper there is a jewel-box, within the box is a medallion, and within the medallion there is, upon my honor, a very pretty picture."

"Whose picture?" asked Raymond, feigning indifference.

She threw back her head with an air of bravado. "The picture of some one I love a great deal more than you do; of some one in whom you find a thousand faults, while I find none at all; the picture of a person whose society you enjoy but very little, while I enjoy it very much; of a person against whom you defend yourself as against the very devil, and to whom I tell all my secrets."

"Who is this monsieur?" asked Raymond in a hollow voice.

"Have I said that it was a monsieur?" returned she, drawing back like a cat that, before strangling a mouse, permits him to breathe an instant, and bid his adieus to life. Then she exclaimed, "But really, guardians have the right to know all!" And cutting the cord, and breaking the seal, she unfolded the paper wrappings with a calculating slowness that exasperated Raymond. She drew from the envelope a jewel-box, and from the jewel-box a medallion, which she presented open to her guardian, who

found that the medallion contained a charming picture upon enamel of Miss Rovel herself.

He let a sigh of relief escape him; and, with the gayety of a man who has had the rope around his neck, and from which it has been suddenly removed, he said, "It is charming, this picture; who is the fortunate possessor of it? and how can he consent to restore it to you?"

"Guardians have the right to know all," responded she. "I had this picture painted in Florence for my brother William. Barbadoes is such a long distance away, that I feared it might be lost on the route, and I preferred to keep it until I should find a person who would like to possess it. I wrote to mamma to send the miniature to me at the first convenient opportunity; the opportunity has occurred, and here is the picture. I have some desire to let it see the world in good and safe company. You would perhaps be willing to take it with you to Paris; the copy will incommode you far less than the original."

Raymond was greatly embarrassed in expressing his thanks; he could not rid himself of a feeling of distrust, and his glance sought to pry into the jewel-case which had remained in the hands of Miss Rovel; it might have a double depth, thought he. Meg divined his suspicions, and, rising, she said to him, "The medallion, the casket, the gray paper, the twine, the seals, — I give them all to you, and the mysteries of my whole life into the bargain!" and, throwing them all pell-mell upon the table, she ran away laughing.

For some hours after this, Raymond had a singularly light heart. He smoked a cigar upon the terrace, and he discovered that the sky was of the most delicate blue; that April is a delicious month; that, after a long illness, the sun had just entered upon convalescence; that the trills of the birds, and the newly-clothed hedges, vied in celebrating the resurrection of nature; that the air was pervaded by odors of the spring; that the world had been made by an all-wise, beneficent Being; that every thing comes out right to him who knows how to wait; and that nocturnal wanderers have an excellent habit of preferring negresses to white women.

Nevertheless, his suspicions all at once re-awoke, when, seeing Pamela cross the court with a gayly-plumed hat upon her head, he asked her where she was going, and she replied that Miss Rovel had sent her to the town to make purchases.

"Do not loiter on the way, you lazy thing!" cried Meg, making her appearance at the gate. The negress heard the admonition, and started off at a brisk pace.

Raymond approached his ward, and said to her, "It is my desire, Miss Rovel, that this girl be immediately dismissed from your service." And he proceeded to tell her, that last night, upon going out as usual, to assure himself that the court-yard gates were securely closed, he had surprised the negress at her window exchanging tender phrases with a stranger.

"Is that really true?" cried Meg with some emotion, which she quickly repressed, as she asked, "Did he wear a felt hat?"

"That does not matter," answered Raymond, twisting his mustache; "this Pamela is a brazen-faced creature, and I long to see her take to her heels."

"Pshaw!" cried Meg; "like all the rest of the world, she has needs of the heart; we should be indulgent to susceptible souls." Then, changing the subject, Miss Rovel begged her guardian to take a walk with her in the park. He replied coldly, that it grieved him exceedingly to deprive her of this pleasure, but he too had purchases to make in the city, and, his departure on his travels being fixed for to-morrow, they could not be delayed.

"I do not like men who are so sure of their resolutions," returned Meg, and, so saying, she turned her back to him.

A few moments later, Raymond started for Geneva at a rapid pace. He was well enough acquainted with the indolent gait of the negress, to flatter himself, that, in spite of Miss Rovel's injunctions as to haste, he should regain the advance she had made upon him. And yet, although he walked rapidly, Pamela came very near escaping him. He reached the outskirts of the town without having caught up with her; but at the summit of the hill crowned by a Russian church, as he was casting his sparrow-hawk eyes around him, he perceived a gay shawl and a scarlet plume crossing a square, in the direction of the Grand Quay. He hastened on, and in a moment saw that they were about to pass the bridge. He did not lose sight of them, and soon ascertained that they had entered the *Hotel des Bergues*.

In his turn he crossed the bridge, and established himself at the *Isle Rousseau*, upon a bench facing the entrance of the hotel. After ten minutes of feverish waiting, he saw the negress come out of the hotel. He made no effort to detain her. But meanwhile, having lifted his eyes, he was startled at seeing upon a balcony, a man of tall stature and elegant form, wearing a felt hat. This man was well known to Raymond: his name was Prince Sylvio Natti.

Raymond immediately left his bench; and so well did he take his paces, that Pamela was at quite a distance from The Hermitage, when she felt a hand pressing

her arm like a vice, and some one cried out to her, "Deliver to me this instant the letter you bear from Prince Natti."

If it had been in her power, the negress would have grown pale and white from terror. The ferocious glances which Raymond hurled at her were certainly not calculated to re-assure her. Still she tried to assume an audacious rôle, and, melting into indignant tears, she protested that M. Ferray insulted her; that she was an honest girl, celebrated in both the Old and the New World for her discretion; that she was incapable of lending her aid to any transaction which would not be sanctioned by the most rigid morality. Then, changing her tone, she feigned to confess to M. Ferray, with an air of affrighted modesty, that Prince Natti was in love with her; that for her sake he lost food and sleep, and that she had betaken herself to the *Hotel des Bergues*, to adjure him to respect her honor, and to cease a pursuit which, in the nature of things, must be hopeless.

"Hand me that letter!" repeated Raymond, almost dislocating her arm. Pamela emptied the pocket of her dress, turning it wrong side out to prove to him that it contained nothing contraband. She had first drawn out her handkerchief, which she kept in her hand; Raymond took the handkerchief, shook it, and let fall a paper, which he hastened to pick up. This paper was a letter. He was about to break the seal, but upon reflection he contented himself with placing it in his pocket-book. "I give you from now until night to pack up your clothes," he said to Pamela. "To-morrow, at dawn, you leave my house, never to enter it again!"

Leaving Pamela to her reflections, he hurried on to The Hermitage. He found Miss Rovel in the parlor; she was seated opposite Mlle. Ferray, who had no suspicion that this angel lodged the devil in her eyes. They were engrossed in untangling a skein of silk, Meg's wrists serving Mlle. Ferray as a reel. Raymond seated himself at some distance from them, his hand pressed against his heart, whose violent beatings he vainly sought to control. When dinner was announced, Miss Rovel took his arm to pass into the dining-room; she seemed to have no perception of the tortures she was inflicting upon his heart. For the sake of appearances, Raymond made a pretence of eating, but his throat was choked, his breath was short: he bore upon his breast a mountain's weight, and the mountain, he was very sure, would not bring forth a mouse this time.

As soon as dinner was over, he said to his sister, "I desire to have a particular interview with Miss Rovel; let us be left alone for a few minutes."

These words made Mlle. Ferray open her eyes wide. It seemed a physical impossibility to her to believe in misfortune; her eternal optimism incontinently imagined that Raymond, whose agitation had not escaped her, was at the end of his resistance; that he felt himself no longer master of his secret, that he had resolved to declare himself to Miss Rovel: the fortress was about to be called upon to surrender; it would rear the white flag, and, no doubt, the conqueror would be generous. Mlle. Ferray hastened to withdraw. Thanks to the celerity of her hopes, upon reaching the end of the room, she had already won the certain conviction that all would be arranged for the best; that before an hour her brother would have unpacked his trunks; as she closed the door, she beheld again that phenomenal infant with dark complexion, and hair of golden hue.

"Miss Rovel," said Raymond, after several efforts to speak, — efforts that had proved ineffectual because of the tremor in his voice, — "Miss Rovel, here is a letter which Pamela has brought from the city. You said this morning that guardians have the right to know all; I desire to know the contents of this letter, and I am of your opinion that I have the right to know."

He handed her the letter; she crumbled it between her fingers, while her face was covered with blushes; then, having decided to open it, she read the note aloud. It contained these words:—

"Your objections are only evasions: I have your promise; it is too late for you to recall that promise, and it must stand. It must be, I wish it; only a few days have passed since you permitted me to wish it. Before midnight, I shall await you at the window which you know. Yours for life."

For a moment such a silence reigned in the room, that the flies could have been heard moving their wings. At last Raymond summoned strength to ask, "From whom does this letter come?"

"From Prince Sylvio Natti, who has formed a project of eloping with me to-night;" replied she, lowering her eyes, but speaking without hesitation.

"And you approved this project?" asked he, resting his elbows on the table, and his chin in his hands.

"You must see," replied she excitedly, "that this note is in answer to a refusal."

"Ah! begging your pardon," said he, "I cannot regard the refusal as serious. Prince Natti boasts of having been encouraged by you; you probably have made your arrangements through writing."

"I have never written," she answered

with a shrug of the shoulders; then, after a short pause, she raised her eyes, and said, "I may as well confess to you, monsieur, that for four and twenty hours I was positively determined to run the risk of the elopement."

His whole frame shook with violent emotion, red lights danced before his eyes. "You confess, then, at last, that you love this haunter of gaming-houses," faltered he.

"What shall I say to you?" answered she. "The excitement of a romantic adventure pleased one of my two souls. Since then I have reflected, and I have changed my mind. I am not very well versed in the Holy Scriptures; but I believe that I have read there a passage something like this: 'There is more joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, than over ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance.' You ought to feel a like joy over me."

He remained silent, but she recovered all her self-possession. "And so, monsieur, you really do not advise me to let Prince Natti elope with me?" she asked. "But he is nevertheless a very handsome fellow, and I believe myself almost sure of his heart."

Raymond felt as if some irresistible force had lifted him from his chair. Standing erect, with contracted forehead, with set teeth, he could almost have sprung at Miss Rovel, almost have trampled her beneath his feet. She gazed at him with an intrepid eye. "To whom are you speaking?" asked he in a voice of thunder.

"To my guardian," replied she, without the least emotion. "Are you willing to argue the case with me a little? I always like to have people give me reasons. If I were to go away from here, and run over the world with Prince Natti, who would have the right to complain of me?"

"Some one," replied he, "who is guilty of the unworthy weakness of loving you. — You understand that I refer to my sister. Such a proceeding on your part would cause her to die of sorrow."

"I am aware that Mlle. Ferray loves me very dearly," returned Meg; "but what I desire to know is, are your reasons personal?"

"Oh! as for me," replied he in a glacial tone, "as for me, Miss Rovel, I am answerable for you to your mother. If you will be so obliging as to wait patiently a few days more, I will write to her to come for you, after which I shall leave you free to do whatever you please."

"Very well," said she, "I know your reasons now, and they appear good and conclusive to me."

She was for some instants silent. She plunged one of her nails into a groove of the table, and with her other hand she

toyed with a curl of her hair. Suddenly a change came over her face, her glance grew soft and humid, then inclining toward Raymond, she said, "Good heavens, monsieur, how hasty you are! I swear to you by all that you hold most sacred, and, if you love any thing, I swear to you by that you love most in the world, that Prince Natti is a fool, that my heart does not at all belong to him, that he will elope with me neither to-night, nor the night after, nor ever; and I swear to you also, that I shall religiously keep the promise I have made to Mlle. Ferray, that during your absence I will cause her neither an *ennui*, a *chagrin*, nor an uneasiness; in a word, that you can journey in peace, with the certainty that she suffices as a guard for me." And, extending her hand to him across the table, she added smiling, "Do you believe me?"

There was in this smile so much sincerity, so much emotion, and so much heart, that Raymond's anger suddenly subsided like a great tempest lulled by a small rain; and his suspicions vanished. He took the hand she offered him, and said, "I believe you."

"In my turn," pursued she, "I implore you, monsieur, to make an agreement with me. Give me the assurance that you will not seek a quarrel with Prince Natti, that you will appear to ignore his existence and his projects, that you will allow this puppy to pass the night in the open air."

He promised by a nod of the head. "And besides," said she, "if you fear lest he may repeat his attempts, what hinders your adjourning your departure?"

"That is not necessary," replied he. "I know, Miss Rovel, that it is not in the power of any one to control your inclinations; and, now that I have your promise, I should despise myself if I doubted you. Besides, I have dismissed Pamela; from to-morrow night, my gardener, who is a man to be confided in, will occupy her chamber, and the house will be guarded as by myself."

With these words, he rose, approached her, and gazed into her eyes; then in an uncertain voice he began, "Nothing more remains to me, Miss Rovel, but to bid you adieu, and to wish" —

"Oh, no!" said she, "not this evening. It has been arranged between Mlle. Ferray and myself, that, since you are not to leave until late in the morning, we will all three breakfast together at nine o'clock. Good night, monsieur, and be pleased to remember our mutual agreement."

She left him, and ran to her chamber. Mlle. Ferray, absorbed in her chimera, awaited her on the stairway. "God be praised, my little girl, he has at last

spoken!" said she. "He has explained himself: all is concluded, arranged."

"Alas, Miss Agatha!" replied Meg; "it is decidedly the House of Lords which rules; nothing is granted to the poor Commons."

Mlle. Ferray's arms fell. "What has he said to you, then?" asked she.

"That, if I promise to be very good, he will bring me from Paris some barley-sugar, some apple-sugar, and all sorts of sweetmeats, sugared over like his whole person, and the sweet sirup of his speech."

"You are forever jesting," said Mlle. Ferray with a sigh. "And yet it may be that your gayety diverts us from serious things."

"It at least keeps me from being sad: I am like those farmers who kindle bonfires in their fields to drive away the frosts."

"And you have not even induced him to delay his departure?"

Meg gently pinched Mlle. Ferray's chin, as she said to her, "You pretend that I am romantic. You are far more so than I, mademoiselle; but, to create a romance, a beginning alone does not suffice; it must also have an end. Try between now and to-morrow to invent one for yours."

Having said this, she flew into her chamber. Raymond, a little after, entered his. In order to testify his confidence in Miss Rovel, he abstained from going his habitual rounds at eleven o'clock. As he threw himself upon his bed, he experienced some satisfaction in imagining handsome Sylvio dancing attendance in his carriage. And yet the night did not wear away without his awakening ten times at least, with a start, thinking he heard some noise, — now the echo of a step which made the staircase creak; now the murmur of a voice, or the distant rumbling of a carriage. He sat upright in his bed, bent his ear; every time, he convinced himself that all came from the vocal efforts of a rusty weathercock, with which the wind was playing all sorts of antics for its own amusement.

Morning having arrived, when he had finished his toilet, he remained for a long time immovable, trying to collect all his strength for the great and decisive battle in which he was about to engage. He passed all his forces in review; they were under arms, arranged in good order, with fixed bayonets, and their discipline presaged victory to him. A little before nine, he descended to the dining-room with a firm tread; he was pale, but calm. His sister immediately joined him.

The breakfast-bell rang; Miss Rovel did not appear. "She must still be sleeping," said Mlle. Ferray, and she at once

went up to call her. An instant after, Raymond heard a loud cry. He rushed up the stairs four steps at a time. Meg's room was empty; a lamp had burned itself out on the mantle, and the bed had not been disturbed. Raymond burst out laughing, and exclaimed, "There is what a woman's promise is worth!" Then he ran like a madman into Pamela's chamber; it was also empty.

He summoned the gardener. This man knew nothing concerning Miss Rovel; but he reported, that last night when he went to close the court-yard gate, the negress had passed out before him, exclaiming as she went, that she did not wish to remain an hour longer in a house from which she had been dismissed, that she would send the next day for her clothes. Meantime, Mlle. Ferray learned from her chambermaid, that, upon entering the parlor that morning, she had been surprised to find a window open, and a shutter half drawn back. She called her brother to communicate to him this new piece of information. He had already gone, having in his heart only one desire, and in his head only one thought,—possessed body and soul by a blind and irresistible need of killing somebody.

XIII.

BEFORE repairing to the police with a description of the two fugitives, and claiming aid in his search, Raymond concluded to visit the *Hotel des Bergues*, thinking that he might gain there some valuable information. His own experience at this conjuncture taught him that the certainty of a misfortune produces a sort of relief. He was almost calm as he presented himself at the hotel, where he had scarce pronounced the name of Prince Natti, ere the doorkeeper replied, "Second story, just opposite the staircase. The prince is in."

"Are you sure of it?" returned Raymond, who could scarce dissemble his extreme surprise; "have the kindness to prove to me that you are not mistaken."

The doorkeeper came out from his lodge, applied, by turns, his mouth and his ear to the end of an acoustic tube, and returned saying, "The prince is engaged, he is breakfasting in his room: he cannot receive."

"I have most important tidings to announce to him," answered Raymond, "I am certain of being received."

And, nimbly darting up the staircase, in twenty bounds he reached the second story, where he stumbled against one of the waiters, who said to him, "Is this the gentleman who desires to see Prince Natti? He denies himself to visitors."

Raymond seized the waiter by the

shoulders, exclaiming, "Go, carry the prince my card." An instant after, he heard a beautifully modulated voice say with an Italian accent, "Assuredly, let him enter."

He entered. The prince was alone, absolutely alone, and was finishing his breakfast. Raymond noticed that the table was set with only one cover. Either from an inborn philosophy, or as the result of an excellent digestion, handsome Sylvio was in that happy frame of mind which enables one to bear lightly the weight of a burdened conscience, and to despise fortuitous events. And so, without constraint, he received a visit which promised to be any thing but agreeable. He greeted Raymond with a pleasant face, and handed him a chair with much civility.

"Prince, need I explain to you the motive of my visit?" asked Raymond, as he sat down.

"I might perhaps divine it without much trouble," replied he with great urbanity; "but nevertheless I am curious to hear your explanation."

"Very well, monsieur, I have come to demand satisfaction from you."

"You know all then?" interrupted Prince Natti.

"I have known all since last evening. Miss Rovel did me the favor to show me your letter."

Handsome Sylvio allowed an exclamation of anger to escape him; then, having apparently said to himself that it was the part of a wise man to be prepared for all and resigned to all, he resumed, "If you are going to reproach me, I shall make haste to acknowledge that I have behaved like a villain or a fool,—the word you prefer will be the one that suits me,—and yet I may remark to you that the intention has never been considered as the deed. If you propose to demand a meeting with me at some future day, I shall readily accept your challenge, for I am very much disgusted with my villany or with my foolishness. But, if you simply desire to give yourself the satisfaction of making sport of me on account of my discomfiture, good heavens! although I am not blest with a long-suffering disposition, I will patiently submit to the lot I have merited, and perhaps it will all end in my laughing heartily with you."

Raymond, lost in astonishment, asked himself what this strange language meant, and if Prince Natti was not the most consummate of comedians, in such good faith did he appear to speak. Not knowing at what to grasp, Miss Rovel's guardian resolved to advance step by step, with plummet in hand. "Is it possible, prince," resumed he in a crafty tone, "that such a man as you has to complain of destiny? Can it really be that he has

encountered resistance upon which he did not reckon?"

"And upon which," interrupted Sylvio, "he had the right not to reckon. Miss Rovel's conduct," continued he, "absolves me from all reticence, and places me at my ease in telling you that a few days ago she gave every possible encouragement to my stupid adventure. All was decided, concerted between us: it is not my habit to elope with young women against their will. A sudden scruple occurred to her; I do not believe in her scruples. Your ward, monsieur, is a satanic coquette: you will oblige me by telling her so from me."

These last words were uttered in a tone of such bitter resentment as to render it no longer allowable to believe that handsome Sylvio was playing a comedy. Raymond was fully convinced that not only had victory failed Prince Natti at the last, but that his adventure had foundered at the very outset, that Miss Rovel had changed her mind; that the elopement had not taken place. What had really happened? He was dying of a desire to know. Concealing the agitation which devoured him, he said with a jocose air, "I promise to transmit faithfully your message; but your complaints against my ward, are they as serious as you are pleased to say? Her scruples are those of her age, and may soon be overcome. Has she not given you hope for the future? Has she not let you dimly see that she loves you, and that sooner or later her conscience will be more easy to manage?"

Sylvio contracted his black eyebrows. "I have given you permission to make sport of me, monsieur," he said; "but it seems to me that you abuse it."

"Not at all; you misapprehend my sentiments. I am full of sympathy for your misfortune, as sensible of it as it is possible for a man to be who has never experienced the cruelty of woman."

The prince resumed his good humor. "In truth," said he, "it is impossible for me to be angry, my misadventure has so jovial a side. Monsieur, in presenting my compliments to Miss Rovel, please say to her that you found me resigned to my disgrace; perhaps I should have been capable of marrying her, and that is a misfortune which would have been most deeply to be deplored. Tell her, that, if I am still afflicted with any regret, I know the means of cure. They inform me that there is in Saxony, not very far from here, a noted gaming-house; there I shall go to-morrow, and there I expect to find the fullest consolation. Hence I conclude that I am satisfied, that you are satisfied also, and that we have nothing more to say to one another."

He spoke these words, and bowed to Ray-

mond, as if to politely request him to take his leave; but Raymond did not return the salutation. For two minutes he had kept his eyes fixed upon the glass above the mantle, in which something of interest was going on. There was, at the farther end of the room, a wardrobe concealed by tapestry hangings. This curtain was reflected in the glass, and at two different times Raymond had believed he saw it move lightly.

"Prince, before I leave, one word more, if you please! What have you so carefully hidden behind that tapestry?"

By an instinctive movement, Prince Natti ran to place himself between the wardrobe and Raymond. "You are too curious," answered he haughtily: "what does it matter to you?"

Raymond felt every drop of his blood rush to his heart. He could no longer doubt that this Neapolitan Lovelace had sought to deceive him by the boldest effrontery: Meg was there behind the curtain, but a few steps from him. He felt that he should die of shame, if, in the presence of this disloyal creature he was about to see, his anger were to betray his love. Raising his voice so that it reached the farthest corner of the room, he said with frigid irony, "Monsieur, draw aside the curtain. I shall be happy to present my respects to the virtuous and charming person with whom you eloped last night."

"Are you a sorcerer, then?" exclaimed Sylvio in a tone half mild, half bitter.

"Confess," pursued Raymond, "that you have been imposing upon me, that your designs have not met with the least resistance, that you are the most happy and fortunate of men, that no foolish scruple of conscience has marred your felicity."

"I confess," replied Sylvio, "that your sarcasms violently agitate my nerves, and that I am on the point of being angry."

His fine humor still prevailed over his resentment; and he added with a smile, "To speak frankly and plainly with you, I am offered freely a devotion and a self-sacrifice I do not feel inclined to accept."

"Prince, draw aside the curtain now," repeated Raymond: "I would like to see the visage that innocent creature you carried off last night shows in listening to you."

"As a preliminary, you must hear the authentic story of my good fortune," resumed Sylvio: "it is the best method for people to give themselves lashes; they are then sure to be laid on more as they should be. After two hours of mortal waiting, I was furious, and pierced through with cold. I gave orders to my coachman to go back to the city. At the same instant, I believed I heard a

voice, and the precipitous landing of some one on the ground. My heart bounded; I opened the carriage-door, I darted out; I pressed lovingly in my arms the idol of my soul, who had come to console me for the long delay; but behold a new illustration of the caprices of the human heart! The carriage-lantern having thrown a pale ray upon her face, there came to me a bitter repentance; I felt my transports subside, my love suddenly changed into a sacred respect; but all this did not prevent this innocent creature, as you call her, installing herself upon the cushion at my side, and saying to me, 'I am here, and here I shall remain!' In place of a heart of iron, I give you one, monsieur, which has warm blood and ardent sentiments."

"And you despise her enough to relate this story before her?" cried Raymond.

"Why should I despise her?" replied he in well-feigned astonishment. "Your vocabulary is a singular one: what is there of contempt in all this?"

Raymond, as his sole response, clinched his fists, and advanced a step toward the wardrobe. The prince barred his passage. "Promise me," said he, "that you will not lift your hand against her. You are giving her a horrible fright. She pretends that you would be capable of killing her."

"I kill *her*?" responded Raymond, with a contemptuous sneer. "You deceive yourself. Lady Rovel has confided her to my care; I owe Lady Rovel an account of the deposit, and there will be nothing more. Prince, must I use force with you, or do you consent to give her up to me?" he added with an imperious air.

"All right! you ask me to give her up you?"

"I command it."

"And you have only to say the word, monsieur! God bless you and reward you! I will obey you with all my heart, and this very instant, and ten times for one command. I pray you to believe me that this ingenuous beauty is here in spite of me, and that the continence of Scipio is as nothing compared to mine. Ask her rather, and let her tell you if it is not true that I ardently implored her to return to The Hermitage; that she protested against it, declaring her intention never to leave me, but to follow me to the end of the world; that, seized with terror, I leaped out at the carriage-door, and sought safety in breathless flight; but scarce had I arrived here, scarce did I believe myself beyond the reach of those dangerous charms, when she rose before me like a phantom. How had she entered? By the window, by the chimney, through the keyhole? I know

nothing about it; sylphides recognize no obstacles."

And pirouetting upon his heels, he cried, "Goddess of pity, generous consoler, come out from your retreat: I am your surety that this ferocious moralist who re-claims you shall not harm a hair of your head."

In despite of this re-assuring promise, the deity remained crouching in her corner; and, the better to shield herself from obtrusive glances, drawing the curtain toward her, she tried to envelop herself in it. Unhappily, her action was so impetuous, that the rod gave way, the tapestry glided to the floor, and the astonished eyes of Raymond saw emerge, from out the disordered hangings, a soot-colored forehead, a flat nose, and the entire visage of this most romantic of negresses.

He stood there with staring eyes and open mouth, as if petrified; after which he was seized with an attack of Homeric hilarity, and with bursts of nervous laughter which he could not control. He gazed now at the prince, now at Pamela; he burned with a desire to embrace both.

"Now for once, let me say to you that your merriment surpasses all bounds," remarked Sylvio, brushing back his mustache: "my ears are beginning to be chafed. Do me the favor to take away, as quickly as possible, this blackamoor whose reputation is so dear to you."

"All things considered," answered Raymond, resuming his serious air, "I could not have the conscience to deprive you of her. In a case similar to yours, this blackamoor became the consoler of M. de Boisgenêt, whose sage philosophy, it seems to me, is worthy to be proposed as an example. However, if you fear lest your Florence friends may make themselves merry at your expense, you may count upon my absolute discretion."

With these words, before Sylvio could take a step to prevent it, he gained the door, opened it precipitately, and darted to the staircase, which he descended at his utmost speed. He took a cab at the quay, and set out for The Hermitage, urging the driver to spur on his steeds. After having been so suddenly unhorsed, his mind was now restored to the saddle: he was happy, jovial, sure that things would turn out as he wished. He chided his imagination, reproaching it for his ridiculous blunder, for his affright, and his mental alienation; he racked his brain for excuses. When the mind is in this elevated mood, it finds explanations for every thing, even for a bed that is not disturbed, even for a blind that was closed, but has been opened, no one knows how.

Raymond held it for decided, decreed, that the first person he should meet at

The Hermitage would be Meg; that she had only sought to amuse herself by frightening him; that she had wished to put his confidence to the proof. He promised himself to leave her in ignorance of the alarm he had just experienced, and to approach her with an unruffled forehead; he flattered himself that he should succeed, for he was proud of the mastery he had gained over himself.

He had left the Hotel des Bergues, not only without having strangled any one, but even without having betrayed his anguish, or having let fall a word that could compromise his ward. The satisfaction with which his own conduct inspired him was blent with the certainty that Miss Rovel did not love Prince Natti. He was disposed to become reconciled to the universe, to confess that there had been a misunderstanding at the bottom of his long dispute with life.

He was not more than ten minutes' drive from The Hermitage, when he saw hastening toward him a messenger who had just been sent to meet him. He held two letters in his hand. Raymond took them from him, and he was seized with a cold perspiration as he read the first. It was from his sister, and was written with a trembling hand. Mlle. Ferray announced to him in broken periods, that Miss Rovel had not yet been found, that there was reason to believe she had made her escape in the early hours of the night, that she had probably left by one of the parlor windows, that she had taken her path across the orchard. They had just discovered, in the forest, a veil clinging to the brambles, and a plank over the stream, which must have served as a bridge for the fugitives. A farmer of the neighborhood affirmed, that, returning to the city between eleven o'clock and midnight, he had perceived a young man and two horses, lying at ambush near a clump of trees.

After having communicated these sorrowful tidings to her brother, Mlle. Ferray exhorted him not to be too much alarmed. "We are having a bad dream," she wrote; "but the awakening must soon come, and let us hope that all will be explained." She had opened her letter to add a postscript. It stated that a messenger had just brought a letter; that she had allowed herself to break the seal, and read it; and she now hastened to send it to him. Here he would find a solution of the enigma, and she conjured him to form no resolution until he had first conferred with her.

The note enclosed within the letter contained these words: "Monsieur, appearances are against me; but, after what has passed between us, I have done only what I had the right to do. My con-

science is tranquil, for my intentions are irreproachable. But I would not have you think I have fled from you. I am at Thonon: I shall remain twenty-four hours; and, if it is your pleasure to come and join me here, I shall hasten to give you all the explanations you can desire. Your obedient servant, GORDON."

This letter and this signature had upon Raymond the effect red produces upon a bull. Stunned with astonishment and rage, he remained nailed to the spot, a mist before his eyes, demanding where he was, what had happened, what he was doing in the midst of the highway, why he held this paper in his hand.

He finally recovered the thread of his ideas: it seemed proven to him, that he was Raymond Ferray, that his ward had run away from him, that he was losing time while a most urgent matter demanded his attention; this was to rejoin Mr. Gordon at Thonon, and politely explain to that young gentleman that he wished to fight with him for life or death.

He perceived also, that two steps from him there was an immovable carriage, to which two horses were attached, and a coachman who was attentively observing him, not knowing what to make of him. Calling out to the coachman in an abrupt tone, he engaged him not to unharness the horses, and to take him to Thonon in three hours. He then ordered the messenger to return to his sister, and inform her that he should not be at The Hermitage until evening. Having said this, he re-entered his cab; the driver was already brandishing his whip, when another carriage arrived in hot haste from Geneva. It stopped suddenly, and Raymond found himself in the presence of Lady Rovel and the Marquis de Boisgenêt.

Their quarrel had been of short duration. After having withdrawn proudly into his tent, M. de Boisgenêt had regretted his hasty resentment. His anger being appeased, his appetite had returned. He was so allured by Meg that he forgot Mirette, and all the indignities heaped upon him by her mistress. He thought of Meg as of the most delicious of dainties; and his self-love, wounded to the quick, had sworn that he would not rid himself of this fantasy. He not only valued her as a morsel fit for a king, but as a superb business investment. He believed he read in the stars, that Lady Rovel was destined to a premature end, that time would not be allotted her to squander her fortune; that whether that approaching catastrophe came to her at the depths of some glacier, or through one of those innumerable accidents which accompany the research for the ideal man, she would be so ravished by the tender devotion of her son-in-law, as to leave him all.

In short, M. de Boisgenêt had made his apologies, and had multiplied his negotiations for being restored to favor. He had persevered; and, after many unavailing attempts, he had succeeded in taking Lady Rovel at her full moon, and had obtained pity. When their own interests are at stake, fools become intelligent. Lady Rovel having secretly confided to him a fact in regard to which she had been silent to all the world beside, that Meg had returned to her guardian, the marquis had made it his study to persuade her by artful and persistent insinuations, that M. Ferray was secretly in love with his ward, that she had the same sentiment for him, that sending Meg back to The Hermitage had been only to hurl her into the jaws of the wolf. His continual harping upon this string had led Lady Rovel to take the alarm. Mecca still lay heavily upon her heart; and, unable to tolerate the idea that any one else should be allowed to enjoy it, she had departed at once for Geneva. She was going to The Hermitage with the laudable intention of reclaiming her daughter, and bringing her within four and twenty hours to Florence.

She had no sooner perceived Raymond, than, stepping down from her carriage, she hastened toward him with lightnings in her eyes; and, motioning to M. de Boisgenêt to join them, she drew him aside, crying, "Monsieur, you have basely deceived me!"

"In what way, madame?"

"You have sworn to me that you were perfectly indifferent to my daughter."

"It is the exact truth, and I am even more so to-day than I was yesterday."

"I beg your pardon, but it is quite otherwise: you are in love with her. M. de Boisgenêt says you are."

"M. de Boisgenêt is the most penetrating of diviners. I love your daughter as much as I esteem her."

"And you have succeeded in making her love you, the giddy thing! M. de Boisgenêt affirms that also."

"The giddy thing thinks so much of me that she ran away from me last night."

Lady Rovel started back two paces. "What nonsense is that you are saying?" cried she.

"I am in despair, madame, that my nonsense is nevertheless the truth; and I have the honor to inform you that I am just setting out in pursuit of your daughter, who last night eloped with an adventurer."

"What is the name of this insect?"

"This insect, madame, is a Mr. Gordon, who has the happiness of being known to you: I shall therefore not waste my time in drawing his portrait for you."

"And you have not yet arrested her?" said Lady Rovel in a disdainful tone.

"The trouble is, that, until two minutes ago, I was not aware where Mr. Gordon had judged proper to direct his steps."

"You have known it two minutes, and you have not yet told me!"

"If you would deign to let me speak, madame, I should inform you that your daughter is at Thonon."

"And would you have the obligingness to explain to me where Thonon is?"

"Upon the borders of Lake Lemman, some thirty kilometres from Geneva."

After a brief silence, she resumed, "You are the one most guilty, monsieur. When one has a mania, a rage, for making himself a guardian, one should endeavor to acquire the qualifications necessary for that office; and when one demands to take a young girl under his care one should give himself the trouble to guard her."

"It is an honor, madame, which I do not remember having sought: in my simplicity, I believed that I had assumed it under protest."

"Is it not you who have prevented Meg's marrying M. de Boisgenêt? If this marriage had been formed, I should have to give myself no further trouble about her: it would be the duty of the marquis to run after—what do you call him?—after Mr. Gordon."

The marquis made a modest inclination of the head to testify how much this regret touched his heart.

"Ah! upon that point," replied Raymond, "I humbly say my *peccavi*, madame. I acknowledge that I was wrong in opposing so well-assorted a marriage; as soon as you regain possession of your daughter, I would humbly supplicate you to give her as quickly as possible to M. de Boisgenêt. I should with both hands applaud so happy a *dénoûment*."

This little colloquy had poured a bucket of cold water over M. de Boisgenêt's infatuation. His prudence entered into a parley with his amorous penchant, and declared that it had already cost him dear, that it was not in his power to make greater sacrifices for its sake, that all such expenditures must be stopped. Apostrophizing Raymond in the sharpest tone, he said, "Monsieur, you are very obliging; but, if it is my pleasure to get married, I shall marry when and as it pleases me."

"And, since it is Meg who pleases you," suddenly resumed Lady Rovel, "it will be Meg whom you will be pleased to marry."

"I beg your pardon, madame," replied he. "New facts, new developments, and

certain events, lead a man of sense to consider."

"Who forbids your considering? I only pray you to remember that you have sought, supplicated, begged, for the hand of my daughter."

"Ah, madame! but I had not foreseen Mr. Gordon, and I confess to you that Mr. Gordon chills me a little."

"He produces upon me quite the contrary effect," replied Lady Rovel: "he revives my idea of having Meg married. You have asked her from me: I give her to you."

"Your kindness overwhelms me, but the more I reflect" —

"Your reflections are absolutely impertinent," interrupted she, "and, like the young eagles, you cry out for a very little thing. What is all this fuss about? About a mere escapade. In spite of appearances, Meg is an innocent girl."

"Mercy on us! such innocence is rather too pronounced to suit me: it will not answer for the future Marchioness de Boisgenêt."

"Marquis, you shall marry her!" cried Lady Rovel, looking down at the little man from a giddy height; "and then there will be no need of your taking precautions, or defending your gates from any future Gordons."

"God bless them, madame! But the first in date of all the Gordons, he who is at Thonon, is not a coming man, that I know; he is a frightful reality. The arrival of this Gordon being an event already past, cannot now be gainsaid: and he is a Gordon I do not care to have set to my account. I beg your pardon, I shall not marry at all."

Lady Rovel turned to Raymond. "Monsieur," said she to him, "you are the evil genius of my house, and should take upon your conscience the refusal of M. de Boisgenêt. If you are a man of courage, you will fight with him, and constrain him to marry Meg."

"I shall do nothing of the kind," answered Raymond. "I consent to go in search of your daughter: if I succeed in restoring her to you, M. de Boisgenêt may marry her, or not marry her, just as he chooses. The only certain thing is, that from to-morrow my memory will be free from her remembrance; and accursed be the man who shall allow himself to utter that name in my presence!"

Thereupon he ran to his carriage, sprang hastily to his seat, and, ordering his coachman to urge on the horses to their utmost speed, he set off in pursuit of Mr. Gordon, without troubling himself as to whether Lady Rovel followed.

The route from Geneva to Thonon passes through a beautiful region; on the one side, it affords a view of the

Alps, on the other of the most admirable of lakes. We may well believe that to-day Raymond Ferray saw neither the lake nor the Alps; but he did not find the way tedious; he had enough to occupy him. Now he would yet once more vow an implacable hatred against all women, against their disloyalties, their perfidies, their envenomed artifices. He would curse those roses whose thorns pierce and tear the hand foolish enough to prop them up, and, in the midst of his imprecations, congratulate himself that he was forever healed. He felt that he could with impunity evoke the image of Meg, that he could recall her beauty without peril; he had submerged himself in contempt, that other Styx, whose dark and muddy but healthful waters render invulnerable the heart that bathes in them.

But, to tell the truth, there were intervals when he said to himself, that if, one evening in a library, he had yielded to the seductions of his passion, perhaps a soul of eighteen years would have given itself to him forever and unreservedly. He would not harbor this chimera for a moment; he repulsed it with contempt and horror; he repeated to himself a hundred and a hundred times that Miss Rovel was but a compound of duplicity and mendacity. He could almost have stationed himself at his gates, and cried out to passers-by, "Honest people, guard yourselves from loving her; she will make your life a hell!"

He hoped devoutly that she adored Mr. Gordon, so that he could throw her into despair by killing him, for he had decided that he would kill that villanous young man; that he could not breathe freely until his vengeance was sated; that, wide as the world appeared, it was still too narrow to contain a Gordon and a Raymond Ferray. *Apropos*, he recalled to mind with some complaisance, that one day in Arabia, when accosted by some Bedouins whose intentions were doubtful, desiring to intimidate them, and compel them to respect him, he had twice discharged his revolver at a pebble forty steps distant, and had put two balls into the white stone.

When one has in his head so great a variety of thoughts, one can go from Geneva to Thonon without a moment's *ennui*; and, great as was Raymond's impatience to arrive at his journey's end, he did not dream of complaining of the length of the way.

XII.

AFTER Raymond's departure, Lady Rovel, without leaving the spot, made a new assault upon M. de Boisgenêt. Re-

suming her former demonstration where she had left it, she proved to him by the most conclusive reasoning, that the first of his duties was to release her forever from the arduous task of taking care of her daughter; she demonstrated to him, that he had been sent into the world expressly for this purpose, that a man of honor holds to fulfilling his destiny, that a man of settled principles does not change his mind, that a man of sense and spirit views things from a lofty standpoint, despising details and such a bagatelle as an elopement, and that consequently he ought to marry Meg at once. Her stupid guardian must by this time have rescued her from Mr. Gordon, and it was Lady Rovel's intention that this affair should be arranged before sunset; for this purpose she would have the honor of accompanying M. de Boisgenêt, that very instant, to Thonon.

The marquis defended himself with beak and talons. Lady Rovel flew into a passion, and the marquis also became very angry. He refused peremptorily to submit to her terms; he declared that the merchandise was too much damaged to find a purchaser; that, for his part, he abandoned it; that certain développements went beyond his courage, that he should not allow himself to be taken for a ninny.

Lady Rovel foreswore the marquis forever, and ordered her coachman to drive at once to Thonon. The latter fearing that his horses, a little broken-winded, could not hold out for so long a journey, represented to her that it would be more agreeable to take the route by water. Leaving the marquis in the lurch, she bade the coachman take her back to Geneva; and, arriving at the quay, she saw a steamboat just ready to depart, and took passage upon it.

As the boat left the harbor, Lady Rovel, standing upright at the stern, her hand upon the railing, her forehead inclined toward the water, abandoned herself to the current of her mournful thoughts, and let her mind drift far away. The chagrin which her daughter's foolish escapade had caused, her soon gave place to melancholy reflections upon herself. She recalled her past to mind, the long series of errors which had accompanied her odyssey through the world. She enumerated her illusions, she saw defile before her all the men who had deluded her by a family resemblance to her dreams. From so many vain experiences, what remained to her? An insupportable emptiness, a scorn of that she had loved. If the past disheartened her, the future made her shudder. She had lost even the power of self-deception: a funereal voice cried out to her, "Seek nothing more, for there is nothing more"

She gazed at the white birds skimming the surface of the water where they pursued some invisible prey; now they would ascend, whirling rapidly through the air, now they plunged yet again into the eddying waves, and, gliding over them, renewed incessantly their pursuits and their diversions.

She listened also to the perpetual monotone of the waves breaking against the shore, now withdrawing with a hollow sound, now bearing back their white scrolls to the land eternally amused by their murmur and their foam. She compared sadly the indefatigable industry of Nature, who repeats herself forever without weariness, and the sombre destiny of a human soul arrived at the age when the illusions of life are over; when it feels at the same time its powerlessness to engage in any new pursuit, and a mysterious horror of being done with all.

Having indulged for a time in these sombre reflections, Lady Rovel began to pity herself: she accused envious fortune which had denied her happiness, while always renewing the waves and the seagulls. Lifting her head, she hurled a glance of disdain upon the Alps, upon their peaks and their silver cupolas. She came to the conclusion that Mont Blanc was only a mole-hill, the world a dismal box where one stifles for lack of air, and the sky its cover.

As she turned around, and let her disenchanted glance wander off into space, she saw, walking up and down the deck, a man still young, whom she remembered having met somewhere. His pale, expressive face was illuminated by large brown eyes of a mysterious beauty, and which, by reason of much journeying through the heavens, held the earth in disdain. Turning over the dusty leaves of her memory's register, Lady Rovel found there the name of the Wesleyan missionary, who last summer had harangued her upon the shore of Lake Lucerne, and whom she had nonplussed with a smile. Here he stood before her! At sight of him her heart was moved. Certain interviews leave within us deeper traces than we are aware of; our soul, unknown to ourself, preserves their remembrance: it germinates, it grows there. Where only an acorn had fallen, we are astonished at finding an oak; the acorn was buried silently in the earth, and that which has sprung from it suffices to give shadow to a whole life.

This Wesleyan missionary, whose name was Mr. Glover, had passed many years in Senegambia: he had evangelized the Mandinguan, and secretly converted the sister of the King of Saloum. His health had become impaired by excessive fatigues, and the influence of a baleful climate: he had come to recuperate in

Europe, and proposed to depart ere long for Africa. No one needed behold Lady Rovel twice in order to recognize her. Mr. Glover's first misadventure counseling prudence, he did not approach her. Imagine his astonishment at seeing her come to him! She motioned to him to follow her, and led him into the cabin, where they had a long interview.

There, without preliminaries, she poured forth her whole soul into that of the missionary. She told him of her chagrins, her disillusion, of the profound misery of her heart, a monarch transformed into a mendicant, a queen whose purple robes had now become only rags. This valiant hunter of consciences, always on the alert, always eager for his prey trembled with a saintly joy: he thanked Heaven that the noble game he had once missed now presented itself anew to his aim. Not that Mr. Glover, following the example of a certain Jansenist, attached an especial value to the conquest of souls lodged in beautiful bodies, but the glory of converting a sinner who had filled Europe with her adventures might well incite his zeal and his ambition.

He had that eloquence which perfect sincerity gives; at this conjuncture, he surpassed himself. After having fully set forth to his penitent the vanity of the world, the nothingness of earthly grandeur and pleasure, he insinuated to her that the disgust and weariness that were consuming her came as a warning from Heaven, which reclaimed her heart, and alone could fill it. He unfolded to her the mysteries of grace, the byways through which it enters to rescue perishing souls, its artifices, its stratagems, its coercions, its unfailing persistence, the peace and joy it has in store for its elect.

Lady Rovel was deeply moved, agitated by the vividness of the pictures he drew for her, by the copiousness of his speech and of his heart. He felt that she was half vanquished, that the divine shaft had penetrated to the quick, and he redoubled his efforts to deepen the impression. He had too much ingenuousness to analyze exactly what was passing in her soul. If she yielded to the spell of his eloquence, she did not fail also to be moved by his youth, by the humid and velvety lustre of his eyes, by that peculiar beauty which a devotion sincere and yet romantic imprinted on his pale face.

Some passengers came up, and the theme of the conversation changed. Mr. Glover obligingly responded to the various questions Lady Rovel addressed to him concerning his foreign life and travels. He told her of Senegambia, of his fatigues, of his campaigns, of that Mandinguan princess whom he flattered

himself he had won for the gospel, of his impatience to return to Africa, and consummate the work he had begun there.

At these recitals, Lady Rovel's imagination took fire. The forests of giant baobabs, the butter-tree, the immense savannas over which wander herds of elephants and wild boars, the black seraglios, the negroes dancing to the sound of the tambourine, the strange customs, the dangers — all these were intermingled in her soul with the mysteries of grace, with the peace of the elect, and the felicity of a regenerated conscience. It appeared to her that all these dissimilar ideas harmonized delightfully, that Senegambia was the one place in the world most resembling paradise, and lightning-gleams of hope flashed before her eyes.

It occurred to her to inquire what sort of man the King of Senegambia might be, and if there was any probability of his becoming a Christian. Mr. Glover replied that this crabbed despot would incontinently have four hundred thousand of his subjects decapitated if he should suspect them of treason to his fetich or to Mahomet. The portrait he drew of this personage set the seal to Lady Rovel's infatuation. This decapitating African despot rose up before her imagination, surrounded by a halo, and all the prestige of an imposing majesty. She decided that the honor of converting him was reserved for her, that she was at last to decipher the hitherto undecipherable problem of her destiny, that her beauty would accomplish this miracle, that God willed it, that never before had predestination been more manifest. Her future became all of a sudden radiant with the most dazzling light, and, like Archimedes leaving the bath, she cried out in the plenitude of her heart, "*I have found it!*"

From this moment Lady Rovel's resolution to accompany Mr. Glover to Senegambia was fixed and unwavering; this was an adventure entirely different from that ridiculous journey to Mecca, for which she had cherished so foolish an infatuation. But she dared not at once open her mind to the missionary; she contented herself with thanking him for all the good he had done her; she declared that she confided to him the care of her soul, that she did not intend to leave him again until his departure. He assured her that he should be more proud and more satisfied, to have led Lady Rovel to God, than even a Mandinguan princess; and assuredly he did not tell a falsehood.

The hours lent to this all-absorbing conversation had flown so swiftly, that the boat landed at Thonon without Lady Rovel's perceiving it. She recovered from her pre-occupation only upon arriving

near Evian, where Mr. Glover proposed to tarry for a while at a water-cure. Here it all at once occurred to her that Mr. Gordon had eloped with her daughter. While leaving the boat, she recounted her maternal grievances to her new spiritual guide, and implored him to kindly assist her with his discretion, pledging herself to respect his counsels as oracles. He entered into her troubles with a lively sympathy, and talked to her of them like a man of sense and heart. He at the same time offered her all the assistance in his power, and they concluded to hire a carriage, and depart for Thonon as soon as possible.

Meantime, Raymond had arrived at his journey's end. He alighted at the principal hotel of the place, and inquired for Mr. Gordon. The innkeeper, a jovial and loquacious man, answered, that he probably referred to a nice young Englishman, who had appeared at his house about midnight, accompanied by a little Englishwoman, pretty as the loves and graces; he added, that this newly-wedded pair were on a bridal tour, and seemed to love each other like two turtle-doves. Late in the morning the young bride had gone out to call upon some friends in the neighborhood, and the young husband, having tenderly embraced her at parting, had gone outside the town to a garden belonging to the hotel, where there was a shooting-gallery. He had locked himself in there, and in the course of two hours he must have massacred a host of puppets. Raymond had brought from Italy a favorable opinion of Mr. Gordon's intelligence, and he was confirmed in his judgment upon learning that this quick-sighted islander was just now making the best possible use of his time, in steadying his hand.

He begged the innkeeper to take his card, that very instant, to Mr. Gordon. In ten minutes' time, the man returned to announce to M. Ferray that he was expected, and to show him the way. He soon reached the entrance of a garden enclosed by high walls. He knocked at the gate which was bolted, but immediately opened by the cool, phlegmatic young fellow he had seen at the *Chartrreuse d'Ema*. Mr. Gordon received M. Ferray very civilly; but his appearance and his manners announced that self-possession which keeps a furious man at a distance. Although Raymond had been informed by the landlord, that the young stranger lady had left Thonon, his first anxiety was to ferret out with his glance every corner of the garden.

"Are you seeking Miss Rovel?" asked Mr. Gordon with a half smile. "How could you suppose that she was here? I am not so simple as you think; I had

sense enough to put her in a safe place. I was expecting you, monsieur," he added: "I was sure that you would be curious to hear the explanations I had promised."

"You are greatly mistaken, sir," answered Raymond: "I care precious little about them."

"Then you have come with the design of recovering Miss Rovel, and in the hope of taking her from me?"

"Still less; keep her, I have not the least objection to that. Why do you give yourself the air of ignoring my intentions? You have divined them; the exercise you are giving yourself in this garden attests that."

"It is well to be prepared for all," replied Mr. Gordon in a calm, positive tone; "but one never need be in haste. For my part, I have always believed in knowing exactly what I do. And so, monsieur, it is with Miss Rovel's guardian that I have to deal at this moment?"

His imperturbable calmness greatly aggravated Raymond's impatience. "A truce to talking!" cried he. "The place, the day, the hour, — decide upon all, as suits your own convenience; I could not, I think, be more accommodating."

"You would be still more obliging, if you would grant me your attention for a few moments. Since you present yourself here in the character of guardian to Miss Rovel, it seems to me, that, instead of killing each other, we had best come to a mutual understanding. I have said to you, and I repeat it, that my intentions are irreproachable. I eloped with Miss Rovel because I was convinced that I had no other means of obtaining her. She yielded to my project; and, in short, she consents to our marriage."

"All this," interrupted Raymond, "interests me very little. You can make your explanations to Lady Rovel, who will be here directly."

"Is that really so?" replied Mr. Gordon; and for the first time his face betrayed some emotion. "How happens it that Lady Rovel" —

"You can ask her yourself," interposed Raymond; "and you can state your case to her. She surely will not refuse you the prize due to your exploit, the glorious recompense your distinguished valor has merited. This is no affair of mine. At Florence, you allowed yourself some badinage on my account, which I considered insulting; last night you aggravated the insult by carrying off from my house a young girl for whom I was responsible. It is for this I demand satisfaction of you, and this is the sole cause of my visit."

Mr. Gordon gazed at him for an instant in silence; then he exclaimed, "Ah, well! it shall be as you desire. You are

mad; but madness is contagious, and I feel that yours possesses me. You wish to fight: I also wish it. When? This very day. Where? Here in this garden. Our witnesses? We can do without any. Our weapons? The first pistols that come to hand, — these, for example, which I have not yet tried."

He ran to the arm-rack, took from it a pair of pistols, and set about loading them. "This garden," said he, "is a well-chosen place. If a mishap should occur to one of us, everybody knows that accidents are likely to happen to awkward shooters, and justice will perhaps be content with this explanation. But I demand, that, in order to pay due regard to all the probabilities, we go, you and I, and place ourselves, each in his turn, before this target, until one of us withdraws from the contest. Do you accept my conditions?" asked he, turning to Raymond, who was gazing at him with a bewildered air, and seemed to be asking himself if his adversary was not in jest.

Mr. Gordon never jested; and Raymond at last said to him, "Your ideas are very odd, sir, and, what is yet more singular, they are pleasing to me."

"I am enchanted to have at last proposed something which pleases you," returned Mr. Gordon. "It is a happiness I did not enjoy at the Chartreuse d'Ema. It remains to decide who shall have the first shot; I desire that it may be you."

Raymond having positively refused this favor, they drew lots; and the first shot fell to Mr. Gordon.

"Let us draw lots again, or adjourn our contest," said the young Englishman. "I am not angry: it would be impossible for me to fire upon you."

"It is a mournful duty which you will have the pleasure of performing this very instant," replied Raymond, posting himself before the target.

Mr. Gordon appeared to hesitate for a moment: he had the attitude and the air of a man who takes counsel of himself, and seeks some expedient for withdrawing from a bad dilemma. Then, as if impelled by a sudden impulse, he slowly raised the pistol, cocked it, and, with his finger upon the trigger, aimed at his man.

It was the middle of April, and the most beautiful weather in the world. The sky was radiant; the garden had put forth new verdure, and begun to blossom once more. Around a hive was heard a confused buzzing of bees, just returned from their first marauding expedition. A tomtit alighted on the topmost bough of a lilac, and poured forth his song: his voice was fresh and limpid; he seemed to have the spring in his throat. Raymond felt that this sky of tenderest blue, that this garden with all

its budding promise, both were gazing upon him; that they murmured, pointing the finger at him, "The man who stands there chose to believe that his life was accursed. Happiness, in blonde hair, entered his house, seated herself at his hearth, and said to him, 'Make one sign, and I am thine!' But he had replied to her, 'Thou art a phantom, and I do not wish to know thee.' And this man is about to die: a pistol is levelled at him."

At this moment, the tomtit took flight; and it seemed to Raymond as if his life had flown with her, as if the heart which had forsworn the gods, and contemned hope, had just ceased to beat in his breast.

Meantime, Mr. Gordon suddenly lowered his arm and his weapon, saying, "Decidedly, monsieur, I am not so mad as you. I fancy only those extravagances into which a little reason enters; and, the more I reflect upon it, the more I am convinced that what we are doing in this garden is absolutely senseless and preposterous."

"Good God! what idle words! Fire!" replied Raymond furiously.

"Not until you have well weighed my reasoning. You are Miss Rovel's guardian: what advantage can I derive from fighting with you? If I have the misfortune to kill you, Lady Rovel will perhaps be more than ever opposed to giving me her daughter. If you kill me, I shall be still further out in my reckoning. Besides, I am desperately in love; and, when happiness is in my hands, I am not the man to let it go."

"Will you ever have done? I call upon you to fire!" exclaimed Raymond beside himself.

"No monsieur, I will not fire. I reserve the ball which is in this pistol for the rival who shall have the insolence to declare to me that he loves Miss Rovel, and the audacity to dispute my claim to her."

Raymond marched up to him with the air of a stag at bay: "Ah, well! suppose, sir," said he, "suppose this insolent man, this rival, is here before you!"

"Ah! you confess it at last?" returned Mr. Gordon stepping back.

"I confess," answered he, in a voice so hoarse and broken that it resembled a roar, "I confess you have taken from me the woman I loved, and that I still love her enough to wish to kill you!"

Scarce had these words been uttered, when from the depths of a cart-shed, where she had crouched amid baskets and wheelbarrows, Miss Rovel suddenly appeared, her head bare, her hair dusty and dishevelled, her eyes on fire, her face haggard, tremulous, pale as a spring morning born of a night of tempests, its

dubious smile shining out from amid the clouds. A savage joy was inscribed upon her forehead; and, with the emotion of long and anxious waiting, was mingled a little anger at having waited so long.

"He can no longer perjure himself," cried she, "and now he is caught!"

Raymond gazed at her with bewildered eyes; she advanced toward him. He recoiled from her, repulsing her with a ferocious gesture. She then ran to Mr. Gordon, she locked her arm in his, she rested her head on the young man's shoulder, and said to him very calmly and deliberately, "My dear Mr. Gordon, inform, I pray you, M. Ferray, that you care very little about marrying me, that you have good reasons for being the best of my friends, that with the purest, most honorable motives, you have entered into the dark conspiracy I formed against him. Do me the justice to say, that, in despatching him to the Carthusian cloister to meet you, I hoped to render him jealous. Tell him that my endeavors succeeded so well, that, from that day, I conceived the hope of leading him where I wished. Tell him that, in bringing me back the basil which I had sent to you, he gave me to understand, that you were pleased with my messenger, that you approved my choice.

"Tell him also, that one night, at a mask-ball, you revealed to him the secret of his heart, to familiarize him with a monster he dared not look in the face. Please also explain to him, that, furious at his obstinate resistance, I had serious thoughts of running away with Prince Natti; that you arrived at Geneva in time to dissuade me from so foolish a step: tell him that, one cold, windy evening, you and I had, at the brookside, a long conversation, at last interrupted by Mlle. Ferray, but not until we had decided to elope together. Finally, explain to him, that the mysterious sending of a certain medallion was a signal agreed upon between us, informing me that you had made your arrangements, that, the next evening, you would come in a two-horse carriage, and await me on the outskirts of the forest. Perhaps, my dear Gordon, he will say, that your friendship for me is suspicious; if so, reply to him boldly, that there is no Gordon, that a man wishing to conceal his identity might feign a departure for Barbadoes, and that you are William Rovel, my good brother, to whom I owe a debt of eternal gratitude, since, thanks to you, I have just heard the man I love declare that he still loves me well enough to wish to kill you."

"I beg your pardon, M. Ferray," said the fictitious Gordon, in turn, unmasking himself, and advancing a step towards Raymond; "my rôle has been taken from

me; my only crime lies in having tried my best to play it well. What would you wish? You have just reproached me for possessing odd ideas; one of these is perhaps the desire to see my sister a happy and a virtuous woman. She declared to me that her only salvation lay in marrying the man she loved. If this man had been the Tycoon of Japan, I should have rushed to Yeddo to seek him. I am delighted at not having been obliged to go so far, and at having found, between the third and fourth degrees of longitude, a man I esteem far more than an emperor."

Meg interrupted him; pointing to Raymond, she said, "William, what a sorry figure this poor man cuts! He is a bad player: he does not know how to lose."

"And yet he plays, 'The Loser Wins,'" returned her brother.

She reached her hand to her guardian; but he did not take it. His sombre glance rested upon the ground. The strangeness of the whole affair, surprise, affright, resentment at having been made game of by two children, the humiliation of defeat, the supreme anguish of a pride standing at bay, and a rushing tide of other and different emotions, had petrified him to such a degree, that he stood there powerless to make the least movement, or to utter a single word.

Beside herself with anger, Meg exclaimed, "Ah, M. Raymond Ferray, you are, after all, playing your part marvelously well! You are a great man, and great men ought never to contradict themselves. I regard as null and void the avowal that has just escaped you: it had witnesses, to be sure, but we shall pray them to be silent. Good heavens! is it really proved that I love you? Our two prides have played a game; mine has won, but I will be generous. I will keep your secret. Perhaps you will think of me as of one reduced to despair. Give yourself no uneasiness, I shall be very speedily consoled. What future, after all, would have been in store for me if I had married you? I might have fancied that my greatest pleasure lay in making you happy. I now desire to occupy myself only with my own happiness. Before long, I shall, in obedience to mamma's wishes, marry some Boisgenêt, and I shall be free as air. My own good pleasure will be my god. I shall have ten thousand fantasies and intrigues and admirers. I shall make a noise in the world. I shall be the daughter of my mother; and, if the world sees fit to make remarks about me, I shall reply, 'I loved a man who did not want me, and I am avenging myself upon life which has refused me the alms I asked of it.'"

As she thus spoke, her cheeks glowed,

her eyes flashed, her nostrils dilated, and, with a switch she had just torn from a filbert-tree, she lashed the air violently, regretting that it was not a face, and this face that of the man she had loved, but whom she was on the point of hating. Then, throwing her switch to the ground, she continued, "For the last time, monsieur, I tell you that I love you, and that you love me: I defy you to forget me. Do you want me? If you say No, or if your heart hesitates, you will see me no more; but I vow to you by my blonde locks, that you will hear of me. Your own destiny and mine lie in your hands: decide!"

The next instant, Raymond approached her, and said in a voice choked with emotion, "Since you absolutely must have a victim, Miss Rovel, you may choose me; I am ready to suffer all for you and through you."

He seized her hand, which she no longer withheld. He raised the hand to his lips, and he felt that the kiss he impressed upon it was the signature he had just set to his destiny; that no other alternative remained to him, but to submit, and to adore his servitude. Meg soon recovered her gayety, and cried out to him laughing, "I beg your pardon, monsieur; but one evening, in a library, you kissed me better than this."

He blushed to his ears, and was just opening his mouth to demand an explanation, when William Rovel interposed, and said with his unalterable gravity, "All is arranged, and yet nothing is arranged; for our chief concern is not love, but marriage, and M. Raymond Ferray cannot marry Miss Rovel without the consent of Lady Rovel, to whom Sir John Rovel has given a power of attorney in due form. This consent M. Ferray is too proud to demand; for you have a very strange lover, Meg; and besides, if he should demand it, he should be sure to meet with a refusal. The main point, monsieur, is to so manage that Lady Rovel will believe she is compelling you to marry her daughter against your will. The case is an embarrassing one, I admit."

"I agree with you," answered Raymond, "and it is all the more embarrassing, as Lady Rovel will soon come to claim her daughter." Then he told the son of his mother's unexpected arrival at Geneva, and of what had passed between her and M. de Boisgenêt.

"I am not sorry for that," replied William. Then seizing Raymond's arm, and taking him aside, he added, "I learn from Meg, that, after having sounded your praises, my mother has taken a horrible aversion to you. Do you know its cause?"

Raymond hesitated about giving the

desired explanation; at last, yielding to the young man's importunities, he said, "To be brief, Lady Rovel begged me to take her to Mecca, and I refused."

"This is a bad piece of business," exclaimed William Rovel. "It is clear, that, if you go to Arabia, you will not marry Meg: it is also clear, that, if you do not go there, Lady Rovel will never permit Meg to marry you. I have reason to affirm that the situation is a grave one."

At this moment there was a loud knocking at the garden-gate. William ran to open it; and the innkeeper appeared, holding in his hand a despatch which a mounted courier had just brought from Évian. It was addressed to M. Raymond Ferray, who was implored to hand it immediately to Miss Rovel, as its contents were very urgent. They were as follows:—

"Meg, your giddiness admits of no excuse, and justifies all my apprehensions. I have never deceived myself. I have always divined that you would not rest until you had gravely compromised yourself; I have also divined that your guardian is a cowardly creature: please repeat this to him from me. Mr. Glover, the missionary you saw at Gersau, is very willing to aid me with his counsels; he exhorts me to practise indulgence toward you. I shall leave Évian in a quarter of an hour with this worthy missionary, who will henceforth be the oracle of my house, and whose decisions I intend shall be sacred to you. Come to meet us with Mr. Gordon. If that pretender is a presentable fellow, perhaps this ridiculous affair may be arranged. Mr. Glover will decide."

"Who is the Rev. Mr. Glover?" asked William Rovel: "he appears to me to be a new saint just added to the calendar."

Meg was able to satisfy his curiosity; she had not forgotten the scene enacted at Gersau. Her brother seemed greatly edified with her explanation, and urged Raymond to repair at once to The Hermitage with his ward. "I take all upon myself," said he, "but I best know how to act alone."

After some words for and against this proposition, Raymond gave his assent; and William Rovel, having hired a swift horse, set out for Évian upon the gallop. He had not gone half a league, when he saw approaching him an open calèche, which contained two persons. Although the twilight was falling, he made up his mind, when some distance off, that one of these persons was Lady Rovel, and that the other answered to the description of the Wesleyan missionary.

Lady Rovel had also recognized her son. She made a gesture of astonishment, and ordered her coachman to stop. Then, as she sat half reclining in her car-

riage before the door of which her son had halted bolt upright as a stake in the saddle, the following decisive conversation went on in English: —

“Is this really you, William? Have I not forbidden you to appear in my presence?”

“I believed, dear madame, that the public highways belonged to the whole world, even to those unhappy mortals who are exiled from your good graces,” returned he with his most agreeable air.

“No fine phrases: I have a horror of them. I thought you were in Barbadoes or in England; and I supposed that when you got there you would remain.”

“Ah, madame! it happens that I returned very *à propos*.”

“Do you seek to persuade me that you have ever done any thing *à propos* in your life?”

“Every rule has its exceptions; there are happy chances in life. I shall always congratulate myself for having arrived from England just in the nick of time, — just at the moment to meet upon a public highway, and to apprehend bodily, Miss Meg Rovel, my dear sister, who was roaming over the country with a young man.”

Lady Rovel suddenly drew herself up. “Where is Meg?” cried she.

“Be calm, dear lady, be calm!” murmured Mr. Glover.

“It is too much to ask of me, reverend sir!” responded she in her shrillest voice. — “William, I present to you Mr. Glover, the Wesleyan missionary, who has converted the sister of the King of Saloum. — Mr. Glover, I present to you my son, who is the most impertinent young man the three kingdoms have ever produced. — Where is Meg?” repeated she in a still sharper tone.

“Excuse her, madame, she has not dared brave your just resentment; but she has charged me to assure you of her repentance and her submission.”

“I believe in the one just as much as in the other. And where is Mr. Gordon? William, go this instant, and hunt up Mr. Gordon for me.”

“Just now that would be difficult. The Gordons are unapproachable and intangible. This one has disappeared in the air.”

“What do you mean by this wretched jest? Is it that you have perhaps killed him, William?” And, turning to the missionary, Lady Rovel added, “That would be a mistake, a nonsensical thing: don’t you think so, Mr. Glover?”

“Ah, my lady,” replied he gravely, “it would be far more than a mistake, a foolish thing: the gospel forbids us” —

“You understand, William,” interposed she, “Mr. Glover thinks as I do, that you have done a very foolish act in

killing Mr. Gordon; but you are a hardened sinner.”

“Re-assure yourself, dear madame; Mr. Gordon is still living. He has some good traits, this young man; his character rather pleases me, and I have not been tempted to fight with him. And besides, we have only to deal here with an escape of two school-children. This young coxcomb, a short time ago, made a brief sojourn at the Chartreuse d’Ema; he met Meg occasionally, and they fell in love with each other; I hear that they had formed the judicious project of emigrating together to New Zealand. Believe me, this affair is a mere trifle, and they are both as innocent as two doves.”

“So much the more reason, William, for hastening to seek Mr. Gordon. I have resolved to marry him to Meg: it is Mr. Glover’s advice, and I desire you to consider his counsels decrees.”

“Your confidence, my lady, is too flattering to me,” responded Mr. Glover; “but you have misapprehended my idea. I only said, that if, after mature deliberation” —

“Consider yourself sovereign arbiter in this case,” said Lady Rovel. “I understand: there is to be no appeal from your decision. — Ah, well, William! have you not gone yet? I shall not stir from this place until you have brought Mr. Gordon to me.”

“Permit me,” returned her son, “to call your attention to the fact, that Mr. Gordon runs very nearly as fast as I, that he has legs exactly as long as mine, and therefore it might not be easy to overtake him. And then this carrier-off of little girls would not make a sedate husband; he is as indiscreet, as hot-headed, as impertinent — as your humble servant. In short, we resemble each other, he and I, like two drops of water.”

“You mean to say like two cells in Bedlam. If that is so, he shall not be my son-in-law. This is also your opinion, is it not, Mr. Glover?”

“May I dare represent to you, my lady, that the promptitude of your decisions somewhat embarrasses my ideas? It appears to me, that, in an affair of such gravity, too much time cannot be given to reflection, and that before making up one’s mind” —

“You sit there, and don’t budge any more than a stock or a stone, William,” interrupted Lady Rovel. “Your indifference exasperates me. Since I deign to consult you, have you an idea? If you are really capable of having an idea fit to make its appearance in good society, please impart it to me.”

“My idea is, madame, that, after an event which must give rise to so much scandal, we ought to have Meg married at any price.”

"This is really the first time I have heard you say any thing sensible."

"And it is my opinion that she should be married immediately, before she has had time to give rise to a second scandal."

"Yes, immediately, as soon as possible, since I am about to depart on a long journey, and literally do not know what to do with your sister, unless—I get her married. Have you any one to recommend to me?"

"At Lucerne, last year, I got a glimpse of a certain Marquis de Boisgenêt, who, if I do not deceive myself, was very agreeable to you."

"You speak at random. The marquis is an idiot, with whom I have fallen out forever. And then, besides, it would be decidedly impossible to me ever to accustom myself to his cravats."

Mr. Glover smiled in spite of himself. "That, my lady, is a reason which does not seem to me absolutely determinative," said he; "and if you have no stronger objection"—

"Would you believe it, Mr. Glover," interposed she, "that this Boisgenêt's favorite color is turquoise blue? I positively cannot give my daughter to a man who admires turquoise blue."

"Obviously you cannot," replied William. "Dear madame, would it not be well to insert in the public journals, a paragraph to this effect?—'A young lady has run away from the house of her guardian; her relatives are anxious that she shall not do it again, and offer a handsome recompense to the man of good principles who will marry her.'"

"William," answered Lady Rovel severely, "I never could endure either jests or jesters." Then, addressing herself to Mr. Glover, she added, "My son is a madcap; there is not an ounce of common-sense in his head. You see my cruel embarrassment, monsieur; do you know of a disposable son-in-law?"

"I conjure you, Lady Rovel," said he, "not to be in such haste; precipitation is always fatal. Let a few months roll away; the world quickly forgets, and time passes its sponge over all. Exercise a little patience, and you will not have to take up with the first one who comes along. Heaven will perhaps grant you the son-in-law you would desire. I should wish him to be a man, steady, sedate, armed with solid principles, and of an age already ripe. Until you meet this excellent man, do not let your daughter again leave you. You know better than I, that nothing is sweeter, nothing more advantageous to a mother, than to keep her daughter under her wing. In guarding her, she guards herself against the world; the arch-enemy of mankind will not dare come and attack her in that dear and holy compan-

ship, and the mother, obliged to preach by example"—

He was allowed to say no more. Lady Rovel, whose feet for the last two minutes had been moving like a mill-hopper, all at once cried out, "William, where have you unearthed this horse? He is horribly spavined, and I feel it is my duty to forewarn you that you and he compose a very ridiculous group."

"I am sorry for it, madame; but whether my horse is spavined, or not, I desire to submit to you a proposition which will very likely seem absurd."

"It must infallibly appear so: nevertheless tell me what it is."

"Does it not appear to you as to me, that, in strict justice, the man who has caused this calamity ought to be required to repair it? If Meg's reputation is seriously compromised, if this escapade has rendered Meg almost unmarriageable, whose is the blame? It belongs to her guardian who did not know how to watch over her. I believe we ought to compel M. Ferray to marry Meg."

"Your proposition has something specious upon the surface, but at bottom it is absurd and idiotic to the last degree. M. Ferray is a poor creature whom I detest. Let us say no more about it. I would just as soon have Mr. Gordon for a son-in-law as he."

"Oh!" said William, "I only spoke of it to beat about the bush. M. Ferray would never consent to marry my sister, I fear."

"The trouble is not there. Does he take it upon himself to have a will of his own, this monsieur?" Then, elevating her chin, she added, "But William, I should hope you had not allowed yourself to make any overtures in this direction?"

"Any thing is pardonable in fools, mamma: they do not know how to hold their tongues. But I was flayed in a fine fashion, I assure you! M. Ferray flew into a rage; his eyes seemed starting from his head. He declared to me in the most vehement tone, that he would sooner hang himself than marry, that he execrated all women, that Meg was especially intolerable to him; and to all this he added, in a style which seemed to me sadly wanting in Atticism, that he was not the man to accommodate himself with Mr. Gordon's leavings. The fact is,—in such cases this often happens—he has not told me his true reason."

"May any one know it?"

"His heart is no longer free. I shall not tell you how I learned this; but I will content myself with hinting to you, that Meg is an indiscreet girl, and may have listened through a keyhole to some conversation between M. Ferray and his sister."

"Has he fallen in love, this Bedouin?" asked Lady Rovel, elevating her shoulders. "What sort of person is his Dulcinea? What scullery-maid?"

"A great lady, on the contrary, — an Olympian goddess. It appears that M. Ferray has recently made a journey to Italy. He returned so dreamy, so melancholy, that his sister one day asked him the cause of his sorrow. He confessed that he had met in Florence a woman who had once made the most lively impression on his heart; that, upon seeing her again, he had been inflamed anew; that she had deigned to make some advances to him; that in the obstinacy of a fixed resolution, in the arrogance of philosophy, he had refused his happiness; that love had become its own avenger; that the image of this woman pursued him; that he was consumed with regret for his irreparable fault."

Mr. Glover began to be a little scandalized by all this he heard. "Young man," cried he, "how can you seriously dream of marrying your sister to a man who is in love with another woman? There is in such a project an indelicacy so revolting" —

"I cannot deny to you," interposed Lady Rovel, "that your little recital pleases me, and that you have related it quite charmingly. It is, then, true that this lugubrious personage is dying of chagrin for having stupidly refused that which he was dying to accept? Did I not tell him that he was of false granite?"

At these words she broke out into a fit of laughter, sharp, bitter, ferocious, which caused Mr. Glover an uncomfortable trepidation. "Do you know, William," continued she, "that your proposition is less absurd than it seemed to me at first? It is certainly but just, that a guardian who has allowed his ward to compromise herself should be bound to marry her."

"What do you say, my lady?" cried Mr. Glover. "Would you have your daughter marry a man who has an utter aversion to her, a man whose heart is no longer free, a man who is a poor creature, a man whom you detest?"

"Oh! I shall arrange things so as to see him but seldom," said she.

"Lady Rovel," continued Mr. Glover, raising his voice, "since you do me the honor to ask my advice, it is my duty to represent to you" —

"That the husband suited to my daughter," said she excitedly, cutting short his words, "can be only a serious man fortified by solid principles, and of an age already ripe. Is not this what you have just been saying to me? M. Ferray fills all the required conditions. He was thirty years old the day he was born, which to-day makes him past sixty;

he is more serious than an owl, — so serious that he has not laughed three times in his whole life; and, as for principles, he bristles with them like a porcupine that rolls himself into a ball. — Ah, well, William! Why are you loitering here? Since you wish it, since I wish it, since Mr. Glover also wishes it, depart for Geneva on the triple gallop with your sorry nag, and go and tell M. Ferray, if his melancholy will allow him to listen to you, that it is his duty to marry Meg, and that, if need be, I command it."

"You jest, madame! He may strangle me, but he will not listen to me."

"You make me pity you," replied she, elevating her voice. "Learn, William, that we do nothing of value in this world without a profound disdain for the will of others. Ask Mr. Glover, if, before converting a Mandinguan, he amuses himself in finding out whether conversion will be agreeable to him."

"Hear me for an instant," interposed the missionary; "there are distinctions to be made, my lady, and I implore you to believe" —

"I do believe in you!" said she. "You are a hero, and great courage despises small scruples. Pardon my son: the youth of our day have an incredible pettiness of mind. — Finally, William, this affair concerns you, and we shall see of what you are capable. In a few days, I shall send you all the necessary documents; and, by to-morrow, I shall have written to your sister to signify my wishes to her. Charge upon M. Ferray, attack him boldly, carry a high hand with him, pursue him closely; and, no matter how obstinate his resistance, do not give up the contest. He is not so terrible as you think. Scratch, scratch, and under the outside coating you will soon find the India-rubber. We may never meet again, William. Good evening. The night-dews are falling, and I fear Mr. Glover will take cold."

"One word more, one single word," said the son to his mother. "If, contrary to all expectation, I succeed in my perilous mission, it is understood that you are not to disavow it; that would render my position ridiculous."

"What disavowal could you fear?" replied she haughtily. "Mr. Glover is your surety. I should really like to see the person who would allow himself to appeal from a decision of Mr. Glover's, or the person who would have the audacity to disarrange a marriage Mr. Glover had arranged."

William bowed deferentially to his mother, and had just turned to go, when she called him back, and whispered in his ear, "If M. Ferray should mention that grand lady to you, reply to him that she must surely have been trying to make

sport of him, and that she well proves this to him to-day. Add, that many a fisherman who has threatened to drown himself because he failed to catch a trout has ended by supping gayly from a carp, reserving to himself, as a matter of course, the right still to dream of his trout."

He bowed her another adieu; but, as he rode away, she cried out after him, "*Apropos*, William, you trot badly, you have not a steady hand; and the inevitable result of this is, that you ride very ungracefully. Try and improve in this respect, or such awkwardness may compromise the future of a handsome enough young fellow." Then she ordered her coachman to wheel about, and take her back to Evian. So tender was her solicitude for Mr. Glover's health, that she obliged the missionary, in spite of his lively remonstrances, to protect himself from the chill evening air by accepting half of her shawl.

Thus, in the midst of a public highway, while the early night-dews were falling over the landscape, and the first stars were twinkling from the sky, at the end of a quarter of an hour's conference between an open calèche and a spavined horse, was decided, arranged, concluded, through the counsels of a missionary who had not been allowed to finish a single one of his phrases, the marriage of Raymond Ferray and Miss Meg Rovel. Enchanted with having so well conducted his negotiations, and quite carried away by their success, William Rovel galloped back to Geneva, doing his best to catch up with the berlin which bore Meg and her guardian.

Lady Rovel was no less happy than her son. Into her felicity entered, in about equal doses, the agreeable prospect of being forever freed from the care and the rivalry of her daughter, the satisfaction of having for a son-in-law a man who was in love with herself, the assurance that the insolent pedant who had presumed to despise her favor had avenged her through the bitterest remorse, the sweet satisfaction that a well-spent day leaves behind it, the joyousness of a heart putting forth new blossoms of hope, a reconquered future, the beauty of that evening star for which she had always professed a superstitious reverence, and whose vivid lustre seemed to her a happy presage; and, finally, the brown eyes of a missionary, and the confused vision of a negro king, who at this very moment, assailed by a sudden presentiment, was perhaps dreaming of the most beautiful of the whites.

Mr. Glover was less content. It outraged his sense of truth and candor to find himself regarded as the author of a marriage which he had absolutely disapproved; and the character of Lady Rovel

began to alarm him. He feared that her conversion would require a longer time than that of twenty thousand Mandingans; and he questioned his conscience as to whether he had done well in accepting half of her shawl.

Meantime, Meg had a long interview with her guardian. He made known to her his apprehensions; he exhorted her to take ample time to reflect, to examine her sentiments, to assure herself that her heart was not the dupe of her imagination. He represented to her their incompatibility in age, in disposition; and he especially reproached her for her rare talent as *comédienne*. She closed his mouth by saying to him, "Let us put things at the worst: let us suppose that my faults are to cause you a great deal of suffering. It is an adage of my mother's, who has never passed for a fool, that the man who is not willing to suffer should renounce life, and that he who renounces life is a coward."

As they arrived at an inn situated upon the summit of a hill, they met a small, open carriage, in which was jolted about a little, meagre woman. Left to wait, devoured by anxiety, Mlle. Ferray had decided to set out for Thonon. She had been going along at a jog-trot, talking with the darkness, with the wind, with the earth, with the sky, with I know not what invisible being who appeared to her more real than all that is seen. Big with thoughts which far outstripped her glance, her little eyes rummaged unweariedly into the mysteries of the night, as if to wrest from them their secret. Meg recognized her by the vivid glow projected from a forge, and cried out to her, "My dream is fulfilled, mademoiselle: I have to-day discovered a wise man who is fool enough to marry me."

Mlle. Ferray slipped unbidden from the vehicle; and, her brother calling her, she rushed toward him. She was forestalled by a horseman who came up on the gallop, and, presenting himself at the carriage-door, said solemnly to Raymond, "Monsieur, you are either to marry my sister, or I am to blow out your brains. Such is the express command of my terrible mother."

Raymond gazed at him with a stupefied air: then all at once, seized by a strange joy which had the accent of rage, he cried, "So be it! The lot is cast; the gardener's dog is about to eat; but woe to the impudent cur who shall dare come prowling around his basket!"

And now a sudden illumination came to Mlle. Ferray: she comprehended that all was explained, that all was arranged. Without making further inquiries, without really knowing what she did, in default of something better, she confidentially embraced William Rovel's great

riding-boot; while that young man, rising in his stirrups, cried out at the top of his voice to all the people of the inn, "Bring me a bottle of champagne! I wish to celebrate the new victory perfidious Albion has just gained over France!"

Some weeks later, Lady Rovel assisted at the marriage of her daughter. She wore the severe toilet of a woman who has renounced the world, and vowed herself to a life of austerities. She departed the next day for Africa as a missionary, under the care of Mr. Glover, who, more and more embarrassed with his neophyte, still charitably persisted in not despairing of her amendment.

Raymond has become reconciled to Paris, to the world, and to the History of Mahomet. If it must be told, people pretend that he is not happy, that he is tormented by jealousy. I believe nothing at all of it, and I will tell you the reason why. The last time he went back to The Hermitage, he betook himself to the house Lady Rovel had occupied, to buy an old oak clothes-press. As the owners made some objection to selling it, asking the

reason of this strange caprice, and what value he could possibly attach to an old piece of furniture by no means a work of art, he answered, "It was there I found happiness, and it is the first time happiness has been found in a clothes-press."

Not long since, we read in the English journals, that a woman celebrated for her beauty and her adventures had arrived, in the company of a missionary, at Kaconc, the capital of the kingdom of Saloum; that she had undertaken to convert the sovereign to Christianity, but had converted him only to her beauty and to monogamy. It was also stated, that she had had violent words with the missionary on this subject; and that, having procured his banishment by royal edict, she had been enthroned in the depopulated seraglio, where, venerated by the whole country as a fetich, — and this is the *ne plus ultra* of Senegambian adoration, — she reigns to-day, and finds the most lively satisfaction in swaying the sceptre over four hundred thousand frizzled heads. This proves that there are many ways of being happy; but the most precarious of all happiness must be that which depends upon the whims and caprices of a Mandiguan king.

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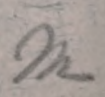
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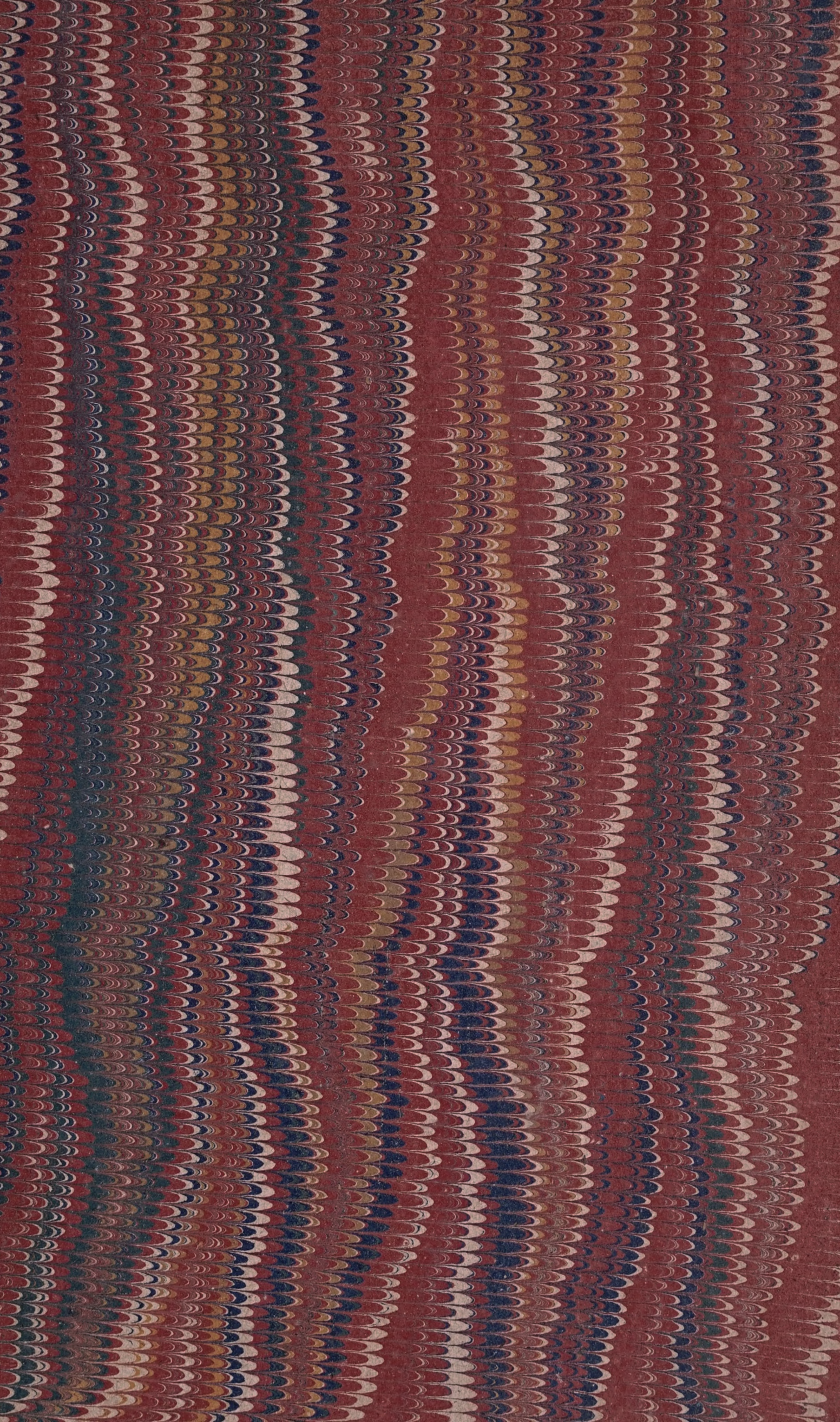
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